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A TOUR IN MONGOLIA

THE AUTHOR

A TOUR IN MONGOLIA

BY

BEATRIX BULSTRODE

(Mrs. EDWARD MANICO GULL)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BEARING ON THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THAT COUNTRY BY

DAVID FRASER

("TIMES" CORRESPONDENT IN PEKING)

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ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR'S PHOTOGRAPHS AND A MAP

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G.C.I.E., K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

H.B.M. MINISTER IN CHINA

INTRODUCTION

MRS. GULL (Mrs. Bulstrode as she then was) had the fortune, not to mention the pluck, to be in Urga at a time when history was being made for Mongolia. I well remember the perturbation in British official circles in Peking when this adventurous lady, at a time when the Chinese were fighting the Mongols, sought a passport to take her through the opposing lines, and so to the desired destination. Needless to say the passport was not forthcoming, whereupon Mrs. Gull, without papers, went off by herself, and succeeded in making a considerable journey which brought her perilously close to the unsettled region in which guerilla warfare was proceeding.

Her experiences in Inner Mongolia made it plain that getting through to Urga meant a detour so long, expensive, and risky as not to be worth while. Accordingly, she and her sporting companion, Mr. E. M. Gull, a fire-eater in the pursuit of political developments, went round the back way by train and reached Urga from Siberia, no small

adventure, considering the state of Mongolia at the time. What they saw Mrs. Gull describes in her own taking manner, and I need not say more about her book than that it is full of enlightenment as regards the character of both people and country. Mongolia is one of the few remaining great backwaters of the world, neglected because so remote from the sea and the civilisation arising out of marine communication. Nevertheless, through Mongolia, at no distant date, must be constructed that line which will link China with the Siberia Railway, and constitute part of the great trunk route joining Europe with the Far East.

If those of us who dwell in the Far East are not very far out in our calculations, the Pacific is to be one of the great spheres of economic development in the future. In China there is illimitable scope for such development, and it is obvious that the question of the control of the quickest route between China and the West is one of much importance to all interested. Mongolia, moreover, is not all Gobi desert, nor is the Gobi a desert except in an unimportant degree. It is, in fact, a monster plateau, huge areas of which are capable of cultivation. At present, its pastoral inhabitants are like the Arabs of Mesopotamia, roaming the land with flocks and herds, but the land is a land of much promise. Its mineral wealth has hardly

been examined at all, though gold and coal are known to exist. But, when we recollect the known mineral wealth of the whole of the mountainous region of the southern confines of Siberia, we realise that there is a corresponding region over the Mongolian border which is, in fact, part of the same mountain system. If the one is minerally wealthy, there is every reason to suppose that the other is similarly so. In thinking of the Mongolia of the future, then, it is only reasonable to suppose that, when penetrated by communications, it will develop out of all recognition, as compared with its present state.

Mrs. Gull is particularly instructive in her analysis of Mongol character. The Mongol is simple, happy, good-natured, intensely lazy, and apparently entirely lacking in practical qualities. His very disposition is the cause of his past and present troubles. He is, in short, not fitted to compete with the outside world. Therefore, he has become the sport of other peoples, and the destiny of his land is being decided for him by foreigners. To begin at the beginning of recent developments, it is necessary to go back only to 1911. The Japanese defeat of the Russians had set the Chinese thinking, and, suffering much from foreign pressure at home they thought to assert themselves in distant lands. They initiated a forward policy on the Burmah frontier that gave

us trouble for some years, culminating in the Pienma incident. They invaded Thibet and occupied Llassa, establishing a degree of control over their vassal which they had never claimed before. They next turned their attention to Mongolia, where, as suzerain, they maintained only a few residents with trifling escorts. They planned to occupy Urga with a large force, and actually built huge barracks there. Meanwhile, Chinese colonists had been pressing into Inner Mongolia, buying land from the nomads and establishing great cultivated areas. Chinese bankers had been lending money at usurious rates to the simple Princes. All trade was in the hands of the Chinese. The Mongols became alive to the fact that China was acquiring a strangle-hold over them. They saw what had happened to their cousins of Thibet, and they became alarmed for their freedom, the overwhelming passion of the nomad. Russia, sore at the Japanese defeat, also, at this time, began to think of a future in which an arisen China might prove a danger, as Japan had proved dangerous. Chinese designs upon Mongolia might presage a threat against her at some far-off time. Accordingly it became Russian policy to block China in Mongolia, and, if possible, to set up Mongolia as a buffer State. To that end, Russian agents commenced a propaganda against the Chinese, emphasising the danger of absorption by

China. Then arose a pro-Russian party in Urga, urging alliance with Russia as a protection against China.

Then occurred the Revolution in China. The Manchus were dethroned. Then followed the expulsion of the Chinese from Thibet, and the declaration of independence by the Thibetans. Egged on by the Russians, the Mongols did likewise, justifying the breaking of the ancient connection by declaring that their allegiance had been to the Manchus, and that, as there was no more a Manchu dynasty in China, they no longer owed anything to China. Russia promptly recognised the new State, and signed political and commercial treaties with it. The Chinese refused to accept the *fait accompli*, and immediately made war upon Mongolia. Fighting was proceeding when Mrs. Gull was in Inner Mongolia, and later on at Urga. To make a long story short, the Chinese troops utterly failed to make any impression upon their opponents. Internal difficulties forced the Chinese to relinquish the struggle, and in 1919 was signed the tri-partite Kiachta Convention. This document recognised and confirmed the treaties made with Russia, gave Mongolia autonomy and a guarantee against the intrusion of Chinese troops and colonists into Mongolia. The effect of the Convention was to give Russia exactly what she wanted—a buffer State.

It is necessary now to jump to the date when Japanese troops, in agreement with the Allies, entered Siberia. The Japanese found it convenient to maintain at Chita, in Transbaikalia, the Cossack adventurer Semenov, a man with Buriat (or Mongol) blood in him. Admiral Kolchak dismissed Semenov from the command of the Trans-Baikal Division for malpractices, but the Japanese refused to allow his removal by force. Semenov, some months ago, inaugurated a pan-Mongol movement for the creation of a Mongol State, which should include the Mongols of Barga (a region of North Manchuria), the Buriats of Transbaikalia and Mongolia. The Hut'ukt'u, the Living Buddha of Mongolia, was invited to join, and, after consultation with the Princes, refused. Semenov next threatened invasion. It is difficult to know how much reality there is in Semenov's movement, but it is still to the fore, and we are warned that developments from it may yet be expected. At anyrate, it is established that the Japanese have been, and still are, closely associated with Semenov, and the assumption is that they are perfectly cognisant of the activities of their protégé.

Returning to Urga, we find the Mongolians dissatisfied with the Russians, for a variety of reasons. They had done nothing for the economic development of the country, nor had they helped

to organise an effective military force. Russia, as a protector, having vanished, the Mongols were helpless, and they were genuinely alarmed by the threats of Semenov. They appealed to the Chinese for military assistance, and in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, 4000 Chinese troops were in Urga, commanded by a General Hsu Shu-cheng, the most aggressive of those militarists who have done so much to involve China in political and financial trouble. It is instructive to note that the forces commanded by Hsu were equipped with Japanese money, and that Hsu himself is regarded throughout China as being entirely in the hands of the Japanese. It will, therefore, be perceived that the Mongols were frightened into calling in Chinese troops by the actions of one protégé of Japan, and that the assistance, when it came, proved to be an army under another Japanese protégé! The unfortunate Mongols were soon to be enlightened as to the meaning of these manœuvres. A pro-Chinese party, since the collapse of Russia, had been urging a return to the Chinese fold, and proposed a petition to China cancelling autonomy and asking for re-instatement. The Hut'ukt'u and a majority of Princes and Lamas were opposed to this step. General Hsu Shu-cheng, on arrival at Urga, immediately pressed for signature of the petition, and, on refusal, delivered an ultimatum,

threatening deportation to China of the Hut'ukt'u and the Premier if his demands were not complied with. He further threatened the Mongols with Japanese troops from Transbaikalia, which threat the Japanese officially denied in Peking had been made with authority. The Mongols, however, were browbeaten into submission; the Government signed the petition, and the President of China has since issued a Mandate denouncing the Kiachta Convention and other relative treaties, and granting the prayer of the Mongols to become again subject to China. Autonomous Mongolia, therefore, is no more. The Chinese plan military occupation on a large scale, and will shortly send three more brigades into Mongolia. If the Chinese were more successful in the administration of their own country, it might be said that the Mongols would be better off under Chinese rule than their own; for, as Mrs. Gull says, there can be no doubt that the Mongols are closely akin to their southern neighbours. But the question seems to be rather whether Japan is not to be the predominant power in Mongolia in the future. She openly claims predominance in China, and, for the time being, is predominant. Through China she may yet acquire control over Mongolia, or may arrive at the same result by basing action in Siberia. She has plainly told the powers seeking to form the banking Consortium for China

that she wishes Manchuria and Mongolia to be excluded from its operations, thereby indicating her desire for an exclusive position in Mongolia. Most significant is the announcement just published in the local press, and confirmed by other indications, that the Chinese Government propose the immediate extension of the Peking-Suiyuan Railway to Urga. The Chinese Government has no money for such an enterprise, and no possibility of getting it except by a foreign loan. This, above all, is a scheme that should be financed by the Consortium, yet it seems far more than likely that the railway will be built with Japanese money. And whoso builds the railway will assuredly be the master.

DAVID FRASER

PEKING, *January*, 1920

A word of explanation as to the tardy appearance of this book in relation to the date of its completion seems necessary. It will suffice to say that the manuscript reached the publishers within a day or two of the declaration of war. The Introduction by Mr. David Fraser, "Times" correspondent in Peking, is designed to give a bird's-eye yet comprehensive impression from the date of the visit to Urga up to the present time of the political relations existing between Mongolia and China.

B. M. G.

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THE TALE OF A TOUR IN MONGOLIA

CHAPTER I

"What is outside the world, daddy?"
"Space, my child."
"But what is outside space then?"

THE fascination of the unknown, a deep love of the picturesque, and inherent desire to revert awhile to the primitive—these were probably some of the factors that made a little tour in Mongolia so essentially desirable to me at a period when, instead of turning my face homewards, I merely felt the compelling desire for more. The remark, "Such a pity you did not come here before the old order of things passed away," had assailed my ears like minute-guns throughout my eighteen months in China, and here in Mongolia was at last an opportunity of meeting with mediævalism untouched.

The most delightful, and by far the most interesting, expedition that lures the traveller for a couple of days from the gaiety of life in Peking, is that which leads him out to the Ming tombs

and a little farther on to meditate upon change and decay from the summit of the Great Wall. The Great Wall may well have been the ultimate goal of all his wanderings in China, a goal indeed at which to pause and reflect upon all he has learned and seen through the months spent in journeying up from the turbulent south to the heart of China in the north. But even so it is a little disappointing upon arriving at the Nank'ou Pass to be informed that this, impressive though it be, is merely a relatively modern branch of the Great Wall itself, added no less than 1700 years later to the original construction. To see the *real* Great Wall then, the wall that has withstood the ravages both of Huns and Tartars, the wall that played a not unimportant part in warfare two centuries before the Christian era—this furnished me at least with an excuse to get away to Kalgan; and in a visit to Kalgan, the starting-point for the historic caravans which penetrate the desert, across which prior to the existence of the Trans-Siberian railway all merchandise passed to the north, I foresaw the germ which might, with a little luck, blossom out into a little expedition across the frontier.

At Dr. Morrison's hospitable board, to which drift inevitably those travellers who want something more than the social round and the sights provided for the globe trotter in Peking, I was fortunate in meeting a couple of Norwegian missionaries who were good enough to make ar-

rangements for me to stay in their compound at Kalgan. The husband, after many years' work, had abandoned the hope of converting the Mongols to Christianity, and had placed his unique knowledge of the people and of their country—doubtless in return for a handsome salary (on paper)—at the disposal of the new Chinese Government. In common with every one else to whom I mentioned my project of travelling in Mongolia, these good people did their best to put me off, but finally, seeing that I intended to carry out my idea willy-nilly, they helped me in making my plans, engaged the Chinese who accompanied me, and lent me the various accessories of camp life, etc., in the most generous manner possible.

For some weeks past threatenings and rumours of war had been dribbling in from various points on the Mongolian frontier. Mongol soldiers (converted robber bands) in ridiculously small numbers, but effectual, as having been armed and trained by "the Urga government," which to all intents and purposes is another name for Russian officers, were said to be marching south, "plundering everywhere and killing Chinese and Mongols without distinction".

The Chinese in Peking were doubtless growing uneasy, and the following paragraph which appeared about this time in the "Peking Daily News," a Chinese-owned newspaper with an European circulation, suggests that the authorities were somewhat late in the field with their

honours and encouragements for those Mongols who even now were perhaps flirting with presents of roubles from a more northern source. Already the storm was brewing past control:—

"The Bureau of Mongolian and Tibetan affairs (in Peking) reports that a petition from the Shang Chia Hut'ukt'u has been received, stating that the Shang Chodba has supported the Republican cause and requesting that he be rewarded.

"As Pa-yen-chi-erh-ko-la, the Shang Chodba and Dassak Da Lama, has been loyal to the Republic and is highly commendable, he is hereby permitted to sit on a Green Cart and to use Yellow Reins, as an encouragement."

No very highly imaginative mind is surely necessary to conjure up a scene of wonderful picturesqueness from the foregoing. To see a beaming "Da (or great) Lama" seated upon the shafts of his new Green Cart and driving a hefty white mule with his lately acquired Yellow Reins, feeling tremendously encouraged thereby in his loyalty to China, the recently established republic of Mongolia's suzerain—it was worth while, *coûte que coûte!*

Peking, so far as I was concerned, had more than come up to its reputation for kindness and hospitality. I had certainly put the former to the test during a short but sharp bout of illness I had encountered there, when I can only say that my room presented the appearance of a conservatory and that rarely an hour passed without some

friendly "chit" of enquiry and sympathy. All the same, it had been much borne in upon me that any deviation from the narrow path to the golf links, or from the delightful picnics held in one or other of the recognised show places within hail of the Legation quarter, was looked upon with cold disfavour. Few things seem to cause a certain type of mind more annoyance than that one should care to travel on lines other than those parallel with their own.

The less, I felt, that I discussed my projected plans the better. Therefore, informing merely a couple of friends who happened to be dining with me the previous evening—and who, by the way, did not in the least believe me—that I was off in the morning to Kalgan for a few days, I set forth for the Shih Chi Men station (the terminus of the Peking-Kalgan railway) at the break of one glorious day of April in 1913.

Two 'ricshas were necessary for myself and a very modest amount of luggage, and to each 'ricsha two coolies, for the Shih Chi Men is at the extreme north-west of Peking, to gain which one has to travel diagonally across the Tartar city, skirting the rose-coloured walls of the Forbidden City through which at that time the traffic was not allowed to penetrate. The road is bad and exceedingly dusty, and being the sole European upon arriving at the station, I had the inevitable uproar with my coolies as regards payment. One of the untoward influences that we Westerns seem

to have exerted upon the Chinese coolie class is that they will always try to bully anyone who is at a disadvantage—a condition of affairs I never once experienced up country, off the beaten track, where I met with nothing but chivalry. The quartet followed me, shouting and yelling, on to the platform—I having taken good care not to pay them until my belongings were safely out of their hands—only to be buffeted and finally kicked out by the station officials.

The journey from Peking to Kalgan has many points of interest, and I decided to break it half-way in order to pay a second visit to the tombs of the Emperors of the Ming dynasty, stopping overnight at the quaint little half-westernised hotel kept by a Chinaman at the foot of the Nank'ou Pass. There was not much choice as to the means of covering the eleven or twelve miles between Nank'ou and the tombs, and I decided in favour of the solitary pony instead of the unattractive looking mules, or the chair of the indolent which is carried on poles by four coolies. I had confidently expected to make the expedition in peaceful solitude; but not a bit of it. A pock-marked mafu, or groom, insisted upon accompanying me on foot, and it was soon evident that he set the pace not I. It was some little time too before I discovered the reason of the pony's reluctance to trot except when we came to a strip of grass—he had four very tender feet, and my way lay across extremely rough country, along the

boulder—strewn beds of mountain streams and rocky little paths bordering the planted fields.

The beautiful pail'ou of five arches was the first indication that we were nearing our destination, but even then there were two or three miles along the uneven and loosely flagged avenue of huge symbolical stone men and beasts, camels, horses, and lions standing in silent attendance on the spirits of the departed rulers. The tombs, temples in effect, whose golden roofs rise out from among deep green cypresses and masses of white blossom, are enclosed in many courtyards by high rose-coloured walls pierced by magnificent gateways.

To the chief of these gateways I rode, followed by my mafu, and offering the customary fee of twenty cents, I proposed to enter. Seeing that I was alone, the doorkeeper, an unusually tall man even for Chihli, began a bullying argument for more money. Not wanting to waste time, I compounded finally upon something like three times the proper sum, and he opened the great doors and admitted me into the courtyard. Here amidst the most dreamily beautiful surroundings of pure white marble terraces, weathered memorial archways, steps carved in low relief and the mellowed rose-coloured walls always for background, I felt very much at peace with the world as I sat and rested in the crook of a blossom-covered tree after my hot and wearisome ride.

Greatly refreshed by the beauty and stately solitude of the scene (to say nothing of a delicate

little lunch which had been so thoughtfully provided for me by my excellent host of the Ching Erh hotel), I now felt inspired to explore further, and walked over the grass to the entrance of the chief temple. Dropping from the clouds (or, what seemed more likely, appearing from the nether regions) I was again confronted by the same burly janitor who rather threateningly barred my way and demanded more money. I had now not even the support of my pony boy. I had no intention of being baulked of the whole object of my long ride, neither did I mean to be bullied into paying the rascal all over again. Seeing that I was not inclined to give in, the man began to lock up the great doors, which usually stood open, when, turning as though I were going away, I made a sudden move, pushed past him, and was inside the temple. He was very angry and for the moment nonplussed, swore at me volubly, casting aspersions doubtless upon my ancestry in true Celestial style. Quite unexpectedly, however, he stopped, and before I had time to realise his intention, he slammed to the door and turned the key in the lock.

I made a desperate effort to escape, but I was too late. I was now in pitch darkness and as to when or whether he, my gaoler, intended to let me out, I did not know. I could hear him walking off and clanking his great keys triumphantly as he went down the flagged path. I was far too angry to be in the least frightened, and of all

things, I had no intention of letting the ruffian think that he had scored. Recovering a little from my surprise, I groped my way about among the dusty gods and devils, thinking that probably there would be some other exit, and finally came upon a low door at the back of the high altar. This gave way to my pushing, and opened on to a narrow staircase up which I stumbled, eventually finding my way out on to the top of the open flat roof of the first story of the temple. Here at least I could see where I was. Moreover, I was in the open air, and I could solace myself with the truly lovely view of the surrounding temples and the thickly wooded country side.

Not a soul was to be seen. The wretch evidently meant me to stay there until I thought better of my sins. For an hour or two I wandered about my prison, spending part of the time in speculating as to whether my gymnastic ability would enable me, with the help of friendly branches, to scale forty feet or so of rough wall and thus to escape. I decided, however, that to risk a broken limb was not worth while, and that to spend a night in a temple after all would not kill me. There would probably be other visitors turning up next day.

By this time the afternoon was drawing in, and the wonderful colouring around me was rendered even more beautiful by the golden haze from the setting sun, when I observed three figures walking among the trees in the garden below. They were evidently in angry altercation. These were my

mafu, the burly ruffian (who was gesticulating wildly), and a well-dressed and dignified Chinese gentleman. Without losing a moment, I scrambled hastily down the dark staircase again, and arrived in the temple just as a flood of light was admitted by the door being flung open.

To my astonishment, my unknown friend in need addressed me in pidgin English, "Mississee mafu talkee my one bad man shutee up Mississee. Chlist! (I am afraid that he believed this to be quite a polite expression of amazement) Chlist! What bad man!" The "bad man" was grinning nervously while all this was going on, and in order to show him unmistakably what my opinion was of his behaviour, I gave him a resounding smack on the head as he released me. Even then he had the impudence to ask me for a "cumshaw" (tip), and in order that he might not lose face among the little crowd which had collected at the outer gateway, he only laughed as he rubbed his head and listened to a tremendous dressing-down delivered by the three of us. I decided as I rode back to Nank'ou in the twilight that I would report the matter to my Legation in Peking, but later on I thought better of it. They might have said, "I told you so!"

Starting early next morning, I continued my journey to Kalgan, the line—the only one in China constructed, financed, and managed by the Chinese—following the course of the Nank'ou Pass, tunnelling below the Great Wall a few miles

farther on. Travelling second class, from the viewpoint of mixing with the people rather than from economical motives, the difference in the price of tickets being a mere couple of dollars, I had for my sole European companion an old Swedish missionary who told me that our fellow-travellers were consumed with curiosity about me. They assumed, to begin with, that my husband must be luxuriating in the first-class portion of the train, and that among the English it was the custom to treat the wives as inferiors. Then, seeing the missionary and myself in conversation, they jumped to the conclusion that I was wife of the latter, and that I very properly only spoke to him when he addressed me. Finally, on this being denied, they settled down to the idea, on seeing me take a large volume from my bag and read it (J. O. P. Bland's absorbingly interesting "Events in China" by the way) that I was a great scholar, and that as such, I of course preferred the simple life. That an ordinary Englishwoman should travel second class needed an explanation in their eyes.

A wealthy young man, he who had asked most of the questions, entertained me greatly during the journey. His clothes were very beautiful, a long silk-damask lavender coat, fur-lined, surmounted by a handsome riding coat in plum-coloured broché. His great treasure seemed, however, to be a large silver watch, which he kept pulling out in the hope that I might be

looking at him. Its going capacity must have been precarious for he always listened to it, and after looking carefully all round it, he generally smelt it as well. It was here that I really learned to appreciate the practical use of the two-inch thumb-nail which one frequently sees adorning the hands of the upper-class Chinese. My friend of the lavender coat had purchased a roast duck from an itinerant vendor at a wayside station, and commanded my admiration by the dexterity with which he cut up and ate it, his thumb-nail alone serving him as a carver. He was hungry, and he finished that bird at a sitting.

The scenery on the way up was unexciting until a tempestuous sunset lighted up the rugged mountains, making their snow-covered peaks appear like flaming watch-towers until the sun went down, and with a snap it all suddenly changed. Even in this cold weather we met hundreds of coolies travelling down in open trucks, many of them equipped with motor goggles, which the dust storms of this part of the world render an absolute necessity.

We were two hours late at Kalgan, having taken nine hours on the way (one can hardly expect a sudden transformation as regards punctuality to result from a change of government in China), and I spent a somewhat weary time in the dimly lighted carriage wondering what on earth I should do if the missionaries failed to meet me at the station. Knowing that

he would be of no use should I manage to get away to Mongolia, I had taken no "boy" with me, and I doubted very seriously that my few words of Chinese would carry me far in this frontier town, which, I had heard, would be a babel of tongues, and where among 75,000 inhabitants the European population, Russian and German traders all told, did not number more than about forty or fifty.

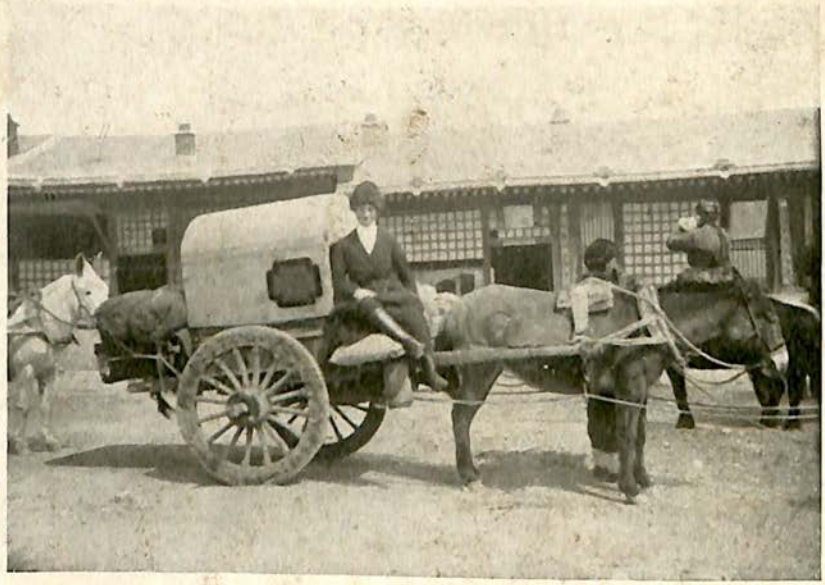
However, no sooner had I landed on the platform at Kalgan than a cheery voice, unmistakably American, hailed me in a friendly manner.

After giving the required information concerning myself and my business to the courteous Chinese policeman, who, notebook in hand, awaited the train for such purpose, the pleasant young missionary, guessing that I was both tired and hungry, and not in the least put out on account of waiting over two hours on the platform for my train to come in, bundled me and my belongings into a Peking cart. The latter taking up most of the room inside, I sat cross-legged on the shaft, the Chinese driver sitting hard against my back on the opposite side; my host walked alongside of us.

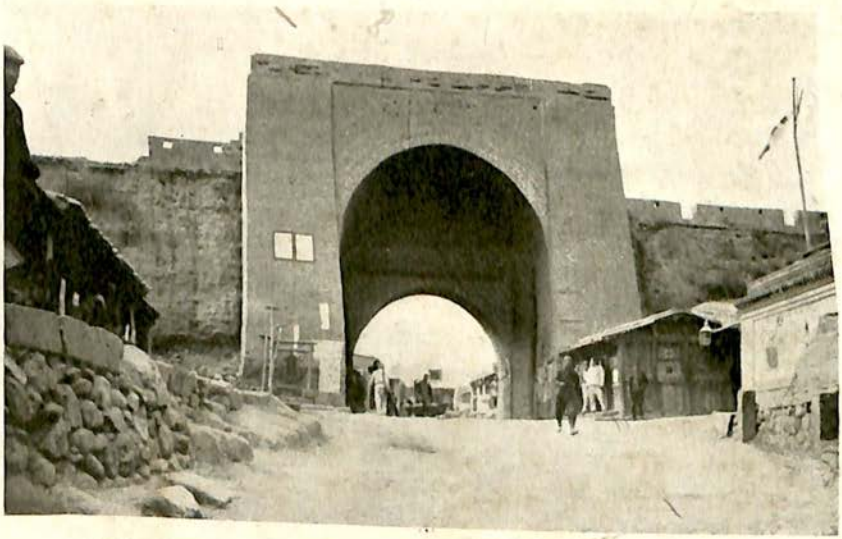
There had been the one rain of the season on the previous day and what under normal conditions had been a foot or so of dust, was now morass, and we passed through slush that reached to the axles of our wheels. "Tuck up your feet," sang out the missionary as he took an

unanticipated plunge into deep water from the pseudo-sidewalk; but I was prepared. This, strange to say, was my first experience of riding in a Peking cart, society in the capital having long ago voted them out-of-date and even in cold weather preferring the 'ricsha. True, I found their appearance of comfort somewhat of a delusion but their picturesque trimness I had always greatly admired. These strong, springless carts of light wood have solid axles, the ends being inlaid with a device in metal, and upon these the wheels revolve directly. The pale blue linen covers, with little windows made of black gauze on either side, all outlined with black velvet, present an attractive and cleanly appearance, as does also the heavy white leather harness with bright brass or silver buckles and ornaments, which embellishes the handsome black mule, who, at first sight, looks almost too powerful for his job.

Our road lay across the river Yang through the heart of the city now, at nearly 10 o'clock, dark and silent as the grave—silent that is, save for the creaks and excruciating grindings of the wheels as the great boulders sent the cart high up on one side only to slither down into the slush on the other, the mule coming to a standstill from time to time in order to let things right themselves. The main street of Kalgan is scarcely a credit to the community. After half an hour or so of strenuous effort to keep my seat, we turned



THE AUTHOR ON A PEKING CART AT THE STARTING POINT



THE GREAT NORTH GATE AT KALGAN LEADING STRAIGHT OUT INTO MONGOLIA

abruptly out of a narrow alley into the compound of the mission at which I was to board, and were welcomed by my hostess, a pretty girl in her early twenties, at the door of one of the two bungalows.

CHAPTER II

"A great army may be robbed of its leader, but nothing can rob one poor man of his will"

—*Chinese proverb*

I SHALL always associate Kalgan with waiting for things to happen. Rumours of war were constantly coming to one's ears, news of camel caravans on the point of starting for Mongolia reached one periodically. Nothing ever seemed to culminate. The missionaries, of whom there were some half a dozen, were very much opposed to my making an expedition alone into Mongolia, and with my limited knowledge of Chinese it was impossible without their help to make any plans for doing so. My hostess, a delicate little thing, very much younger than her colleagues, stood my friend throughout and did what she could to make enjoyable my stay within the somewhat circumscribed area of the compound. Deeply interested in English manners and customs her conversation had an almost childish *naïveté*, and circled around our royalties and other great English names that had come to her ears. She was, she told me "tickled to death" at the idea of entertaining an English lady, but was frankly disappointed that I bore no

title. As a small girl, she said, she had longed to be English, and loved reading about lords and ladies (we now know the market for a certain class of light fiction), and persuaded her mother to call her "Lady Ermyntrude". "Is it true," she would ask me, "that if English girls don't marry the first man that asks them, they never get another chance?"

Life in a mission compound can never fail to interest the speculative mind, and although waiting about for plans to resolve themselves is a severe tax on one's patience, my days at Kalgan are recalled with considerable pleasure notwithstanding. What I wanted was an excuse for taking a camel cart (which appealed to me as being exceedingly comfortable as well as a great novelty), and I watched a couple in course of preparation for the ill-fated expedition of Messrs. Grant and Henningsen who were to journey across the Gobi to Urga on telegraph service, which for the former was to end so disastrously. Camel carts bear a certain amount of similarity to the Peking cart, with the following differences: they are higher from the ground, having larger wheels; they are covered in entirely, having a window and door on the near side; they are of such ample dimensions that one may stretch oneself at full length and live in them in considerable comfort. In fact, I have in North Mongolia seen a man, woman, and two children camping very comfortably in one cart.

One might well be asked what there was to prevent me from hiring a camel cart—a very natural question when one lives in Europe and where money will compass most of one's desires. Not so in the East. A solitary camel cart was held to be unsuitable for my purpose, for a solitary camel cart wandering about Mongolia without escort would undoubtedly attract an undue amount of attention. Camel carts usually form part of a caravan.

Kalgan, with its population of some seventy or eighty thousand souls, grown out of all proportion to the picturesque little walled-in city in its midst, the unusual temples, among which a couple of Mohammedan mosques came as a surprise to me, its many theatres, and little shops containing much that was interesting and novel, would under ordinary conditions have satisfied me for weeks; but the nearness to the goal of my desire to some extent spoiled it for me, rendering it tantalising and me restless. Not once, but many times, did I find my way on foot through the thick dust of the narrow streets to the wide road leading out to the north gate, the Mongol quarter of the city. There one met hundreds of camels padding softly along in the thick dust laden with immense bales of wool from Urga, picking their way over boulders polished by the traffic of 1200 years. The camels are in their most disreputable condition in April; their wool, being in process of shedding, left big bare patches, and made them

look singularly naked in places. I loved to see their stately walk, and the stolid Mongols sitting, pipe in mouth, on their backs. Fine beasts. Fine men. To see, too, the Mongols themselves at their journey's end, galloping recklessly along this terrific road, raising clouds of dust in their wake, stirrupless as often as not, their ponies slithering and stumbling over the concealed stones, recovering themselves in a manner perfectly marvellous. They are wonderful horsemen. A Russian post plies between Kalgan and Urga, suspended now, however, on account of the unrest in the country, and the Mongols cover the 800 miles in eight days, relays of ponies waiting for them every twenty miles or so. They ride at full speed during the entire journey, which averages ordinarily from thirty to thirty-two days.

Small wonder that the wares in the innumerable little stalls which line this great north road should be dirty and unattractive at first glance. One must quickly consume one's proverbial peck of dust here; everything in this Mongol market is thick with it; hair, clothes, food, and all. But what is the use of troubling about what cannot be helped? A medicine stall was one of the many at which I lingered, and from curiosity asked the prices of things that were displayed as "cures"—snakes, lizards, and similar small fry were kept in bulk. A rhinoceros tusk I gathered to be a charm of prophylactic nature, but a furry foot altogether baffled my intelligence. The vendor was by no

means anxious to sell, but being pressed for a price said that I might have the object for fifteen dollars, i.e. thirty shillings. I discovered later that it was the pad of a bear, and esteemed of great value from a medicinal point of view. I refrained from purchasing it. Two charming souvenirs, however, I did pick up in Kalgan—a tiny green jade wine cup, and, as a mascot, a jade thumb ring guaranteed to bring me great good luck on all my wanderings. They were of the colour of rivers bringing down the snow from mountains, and moreover were bargains at a dollar and half a dollar respectively.

Everything that one could conceivably want for the great journey across the desert is to be bought from this market, the last link with civilisation, and few caravans push straight through this busy quarter without a halt for a hank of rope, or another string of dried persimmons, or such like. To the gregarious Celestial it must indeed be a mighty effort to break away from Kalgan and start upon that lonely trek so fraught with dangers and possibilities unknown.

The principal theatre in Kalgan is in this neighbourhood, and more than once I got drawn into a crowd of five or six hundred people in the triangular piece of waste ground near the north gate. The theatre was a pretty little temple, the stage open to the heavens on three sides and raised eight or ten feet from the ground. The play is as a rule, I am told, composed of scenes and episodes

from the Chinese classics. Be that as it may, the actors, with handsome flowing beards, are as unlike the modern Chinese as well could be.

Every one whose business was not too pressing strolled within seeing and hearing distance—there were no barriers or enclosures. At the back of the crowd, which, with less than half a dozen exceptions, was composed of men and boys, numbers of ponies and mules waited patiently, and among them from their Peking carts a few women obtained a good view while not being too much in evidence. Kalgan is conservative in preserving her traditions concerning the deportment of women. Vendors of all sorts of things, from dusting brushes to cigarettes and pea-nuts, took life easily on the outskirts of the laziest, pleasantest, smelliest crowd I have ever been in. In the background too were several barbers plying their trade, their victims gazing at the play while their heads were shaved or their *queues* combed and plaited. The quaint mediæval play, with great clashing of cymbals, and lunging about with swords and scimitars, was lively enough to please the audience tremendously. The whole scene was picturesque to a degree, what with bright clothes and action on the stage, with a background of the mountains surrounding Kalgan, and nearer still the sombre old wall of many, many centuries, and again, in front of it, the flat and gabled roofs of Chinese houses and shops with their ornate fronts and gaudy signs and symbols, the gilded lettering in two

languages as befits the meeting-place of China and Mongolia. Nearer still the handsome mules with their richly decorated saddle-cloths, passed and repassed, and now and again a string of dromedaries pursued the even tenor of their way, undisturbed and unattracted by the babel of the multitude. The colour scheme was blue, blue, blue, in every conceivable tone, and for variation, soft maizy yellow, prune, and mauve—the distant mountains deeply purple.

The old men of China are not the least pleasing of its inhabitants. They are so kindly, so dignified, so placid, and so really venerable. They stood around, dozens of them, with their pet birds in pretty wooden cages singing away all the time, often held on the flat of their hands high up and out of danger from the crowd. The cages are frequently finely carved and beautifully made, the little seed and water-pots of good porcelain, and the fittings of wrought silver or brass. In Kalgan a foreign woman is indeed a *rara avis*, but Chinese manners can be beyond reproach. The people crowd round one, and certainly in the city one never moved without a small following. But here, weird object that one must have seemed, they seldom made themselves objectionable or jeered. One cannot help reflecting upon the difference there would be in the case of a Chinese visiting a northern English town in his Oriental dress and with his stumbling speech. How, one wonders, would the crowds treat him ?

In pleasant contrast with the dust of the city were certain riding expeditions which took me, accompanied by my host, to the foot hills surrounding Kalgan, to inspect at close quarters the ruins of the Great Wall and the watch-towers which punctuate it every 200 yards. Whether he did it to test my riding capabilities or my courage before starting me off on my lonely tour, I never quite discovered, but vivid in my recollection is the climbing my host and I did on one occasion. By no means an accomplished rider, the second day out on a new pony is always more agreeable to me than the first, but when I saw how the little black beast that had been lent to me and which I was subsequently to take up-country, could scale precipitous banks, keep its feet among loose shale lying on hard slippery surfaces, creep along narrow, sloping tracks round mountain sides —places along which one would never have dared to lead, much less ride, a horse at home—my confidence developed considerably. In parts it was too dangerous to remain in the saddle at all, and I shall never forget one thrilling moment when my pony insisted upon turning right round upon our sole support, which was a bit of a tuft overhanging a chasm some forty to sixty feet deep. His heels sent the stones flying down, and I momentarily expected the whole thing to give way, and that we should roll down hopelessly mixed-up, sheer on to the rocks below.

In connection with the extensive railway works

at Kalgan and the projected extension of them, is quite an important little community of well-educated Cantonese, with some of whom I became acquainted by means of an introduction given to me in Peking by my friend, Dr. Wu Lien Teh, whose research work, especially in connection with plague, is well known throughout the scientific world. Several of these Cantonese are Christians and are keen supporters of the work carried on by the missionaries amongst their employees. My introduction was presented at a fortunate moment, for a feast to celebrate the arrival of a first-born son was just then in course of preparation, and the presence of a foreign lady apparently lent to it a welcome novelty.

The proud father of the baby, Dr. Shi, knew a certain amount of English, and, in consequence, I launched out alone, on to that sea of unknown etiquette and custom, feeling a certain degree of security. What was my horror on arriving at the house to find my host anxiously awaiting my somewhat tardy arrival in order to introduce me to the sixteen ladies already present so that he might hasten off to preside at a similar banquet to his men friends at a restaurant near by. Not one word of anything but the Cantonese dialect did the ladies speak, and my carefully prepared sentences of felicitation in the Mandarin tongue were in consequence discounted. The company, among whom was the baby's mother, greeted me with much ceremony and cordiality. The pre-

cise form of salutation varies in different parts of China, and here the correct bow resembles nothing so much as the action of surreptitiously pulling up one's stocking. Dr. Shi was careful to explain to me that I was the guest of honour, and, after showing me where to sit, he departed and left me to the tender mercies of the little ladies. A little later on, however (and this suggests the innate kindness and consideration of the Chinese) his heart must have smote him, and thinking that chopsticks might be a source of embarrassment to me, he flew round from the restaurant with a borrowed plate, spoon, and fork. As a matter of fact these latter embarrassed me far more than the chopsticks had done, for my big plate afforded my two generous hostesses opportunity to overwhelm me with food which the ordinary little bowl would never have contained.

Upon the round table were set no fewer than sixteen dishes, and these I gathered were only accessories to the huge bowls which were brought in from the kitchen, whence there appeared at least a dozen distinct courses. Eggs served in cochineal-stained shells were, it was explained to me, in special honour of the new baby, as also was the ginger of the same glad hue. The feast was heralded in by the customary joy sounds of China; crackers innumerable and deafening being fired off immediately outside the room in which we were assembled. Little leaden kettles

of "the dew of the rose leaf" (samshui) were first of all brought in, and each of us was assisted to at least a thimbleful. Then began the "Ch'ing chih fan" ("invite you to eat"). Everybody "ch'inged" everybody else, and we proceeded at the same time to help one another to dainty morsels with our own chopsticks. Instead of drinking to each other in occidental fashion, the Chinese "eat to each other," and when one's neighbour planks a toothsome morsel of bird or fish into one's bowl, it is etiquette to rise slightly in one's chair and say "thank you".

Chopsticks, by the way, are like golf—it is largely a game of chance and temperament. Sometimes one is on one's game, and one manages to put away a substantial meal; at other times one "can't hit a ball," and one leaves the table feeling rather empty. The meal had not progressed far before we were on terms of great conviviality, not to say familiarity. They all laughed at the way in which I mismanaged my chopsticks (I declined to give in and use a spoon and fork) and tried to teach me. It was of no use, I was not "on my game" that evening. Next to me was a dear old soul in a handsome black velvet coat; I think she must have been a near relation on account of the way in which she took me under her wing, from time to time popping a choice morsel, a chunk of pine-apple, or a gigantic prawn, straight into my mouth. At intervals dishes that I really enjoyed came on, buried eggs, bearing striking

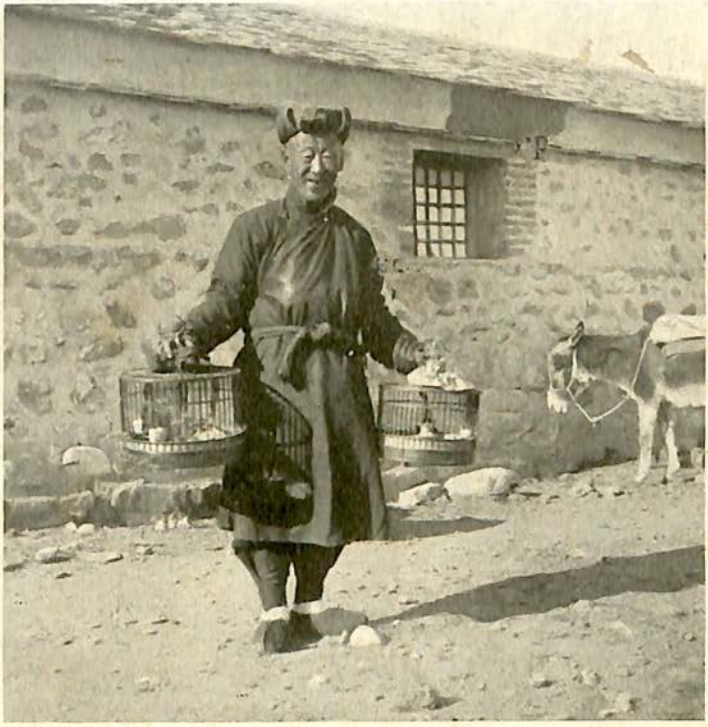
resemblance, by the way, to plover's eggs, crisply baked apricot kernels, roast duck (horribly underdone), and the seeds of the lotus in syrup, being among the most palatable. Half-way through the feast my large plate was a horrible sight and full of things I felt I could not possibly swallow.

A charming girl opposite me leaned forward and gave me a generous helping of some nice-looking whitish stew which nearly made me sick when I tried it. It was like eating a very slimy sponge. To cover my confusion, and with, I thought, great aplomb, I managed with some difficulty to perch a beautiful morsel of very raw duck on my chopsticks, which, instead of eating myself, I unselfishly plunged into the mouth of my old friend on my left. The attention nearly choked her. She did not expect it of me. But pleasant relations were established for the evening, and I received several invitations to other dinner parties as a result. There was a good deal of giggling at my foreign ways, but these, I imagine, were less productive of sheer glee than my attempt to adapt myself to their customs.

At half-time or thereabouts, a woman servant of the coolie class, very slatternly, and with her own baby upon her back, distributed cigarettes, some cheap American brand in a tin, picking them out with her dirty fingers and pressing them upon us in a most hospitable way. All the servants, in fact, urged us on behalf of their master and mistress to eat and drink. From time to time

they would quietly sneak a cigarette for themselves, and go to stand in the doorway to smoke it. One of them was quite an old woman, and it amused me to watch her casually take one from the table and light it between her withered old hands with her back turned to the company. Our hostess, for whom with two or three other guests there was not room at our table, came in periodically to see how we were progressing, and would hand us one or other of the delicacies persuasively. She peeled a Mandarin orange for the old T'ai-t'ai next to me. The latter took it, but at once passed it on to one of the urchins who were hanging around for tit-bits. It seemed ungracious, but I suppose it was quite polite. A great tip to be remembered at a Chinese feast is this; entice one of the many small children always present to your side. You have then, conveniently situated, a willing receptacle for the superfluous dainties that have been heaped into your bowl, besides which you gain merit for your "warm-heartedness" towards the dear little souls.

Between ten and half-past—we had sat down soon after 6 p.m.—I felt that the time had arrived when I might reasonably, though reluctantly, take my departure; but the attempt to do so was met by much protestation and conversation, and it was borne in upon me that my old friend the T'ai-t'ai was inviting me to go back with her to her house there to "sit-a-sit". I agreed with pleasure, and hand-in-hand we sallied forth in the



A BIRD FANCIER, KALGAN

SERVANTS IN THE COURTYARD

moonlight, together with her daughter-in-law and her little daughter, a pretty little soul, this latter, who was the proud possessor of an English watch bracelet as well as several distinctly western rings and bangles. Their house was not very far off, and when we arrived the old lady ushered me into a bedroom where her husband and son were reading in somewhat *négligé* costume. They quickly invited me into the guest room and, hastily donning their long coats of ceremony, joined us. The father spoke a little English—he had once stayed for three weeks in England, coming over, I understood, in the train of Li Hung Ch'ang; the son, with whom I had a most illuminating conversation on Chinese topics, had been educated in England, and another son was at that time an undergraduate at Caius College, Cambridge.

CHAPTER III

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step"
—*Chinese proverb*

ALTHOUGH I never found Kalgan lacking in interest and amusement, I began to feel at the end of a week there that my prospects for setting out for Mongolia did not seem to improve. The place teemed with soldiers, and reports came in of impending battles between Russo-supported Mongols and troops from the south which were daily being poured over the frontiers. What to believe, and how much reliance to place upon such information no one seemed to know, but the persistency of one report, of a battle that had lasted six hours at Dolo N'or, when the Chinese had to retire in the face of superior numbers, found justification later on in obvious fact.

My long-looked-for opportunity came at last, however, in the shape of a Finnish missionary who wished to journey westward into Mongolia, and who expressed himself as not only willing but pleased to allow my little caravan to join his for our mutual protection. My preparations at

once sprang into activity. A Peking cart drawn by a strong mule, and a most unpromising pony were hired for me, together with a ruffianly looking Chinese, said to be trusty, at any rate brave enough to face the terrors of Mongolia, at the rate of four dollars a day. Hearing that we were to make an early start, I finished every detail of my packing overnight, and was up betimes next day, lingering, however, long in the last bath that I was likely to get for many a long day. I ought by that time to have known that such plans as those for leaving early seldom materialise, but I felt anyhow that I would not be the one to cause delay. Instead of 8 a.m. we were under weigh soon after noon.

I had employed the meantime greatly to my own advantage. When I went out to inspect my cart, the driver had already more than half filled the interior with his own and his companion's belongings, sheep-skin coats of doubtful cleanliness, sacks of fodder, and what not. It is quite as typical of Chinese as of menials in other countries, to find out by such experiments just how far they dare to go, or how much their employer will stand—which comes to the same thing. My own theory is that if you do not at the very outset assume the whip-hand, you will get more or less bullied by those who should be obeying your orders. I used my own discretion here, therefore, and ordered everything to be turned out of the cart, including a sort of

mattress-cushion which lined it. They did as they were told without a murmur, and laughed at my persistence and their own discomfiture in the clouds of dust they raised.

I then had my own things carefully packed in, bedding in a hold-all, cushions, water-bottles, as well as such articles as my camera, books, and a certain amount of food. My box of provisions, including tinned meat, Bovril, tea, butter, cheese, rice, oatmeal, as well as a plentiful supply of walnuts and raisins, and a small box containing a change of clothes, were roped securely on to the tail of the cart; fodder for the animals being placed on the top of them. Eggs and potatoes I could rely upon buying from the Chinese for at least three days out from Kalgan. The Southern Mongols themselves have nothing at all to sell, living as they do on koumiss (soured milk), tsamba (a sort of crushed barley), and mutton when they can get it.

A tiresome lad of eighteen or so made his appearance during the morning, and I foresaw that if he came too that I should be bothered with him as well as the driver sitting on the shafts of my cart and thus obscuring my view when I was inside. The missionaries spoke sternly to both boy and driver to this effect and told them plainly that I refused to allow the former to accompany me. They acquiesced; but before we were clear of the city the lad turned up again smiling, and later on I discovered that he was the

owner of the little red demon of a pony, and also that he was a very necessary adjunct to my party.

The caravan consisted of the Finnish missionary, his two open carts drawn by two horses in each, myself in my Peking cart drawn by mule and pony, a saddle pony, three Mongols, two of whom were mounted—who, wishing to return to their homes on the borders of the Gobi, attached themselves to us for safety, and four Chinese to attend to the animals—nine of us in all. We were accompanied to the city gates by some of the missionaries. The government offices, the Tartar general's yamen, the Bureau of Foreign Affairs, as also the offices in which business connected with Southern Mongolia is transacted, are all situated in this part of the city. There was some question as to whether I might not have difficulty in passing the Chinese guard at the gates of the city, since I possessed no passport even for travelling in Chihli, much less for leaving that province and penetrating into the wilds of Mongolia. Knowing quite well that had I applied for a passport it would have been refused, I decided—upon the advice, I may say; of an official high up in the Chinese government service—to dispense with that formality. The missionaries, good sportsmen that they were, intended to acquaint the Chinese Foreign Office with the fact that I was in Mongolia *after my departure.* The Chinese, however, take but little account

of women, and I passed through the north gate on the high road to the goal of my ambition.

Riding, I soon found, was not much fun over this rocky way. I had yet to grow used to trusting entirely to luck, and to letting the pony have his head under such conditions. Moreover, knowing nothing of the country one was obliged at first to keep within sight of the caravan, which hereabouts went forward at a snail's pace. I therefore spared my pony for a spell, and giving it to the boy to lead, I retired to my cart to lie down, and with my feet sticking out over the mule's back, meditate on what was before me.

The road for ten miles or so follows the mud-coloured valley where the clusters of houses so tone in with their surroundings that one might think that they did so upon the theory of protective adaptation to their environment. From the rocks and boulders with which the road is strewn it might well have been a river-bed until the steep ascent of some 2400 feet from the level to the Chang Chia K'ou, the Kalgam, or Han-o-pa (meaning handle) Pass begins. The carts here began to progress in brief spasms, and the gradient, together with the general conditions, made this a somewhat painful experience. Leading our ponies, we were able by devious paths to discover rather smoother going, and the number one Mongol, a charming old man of some position, who, having no mount, now seated himself (without invitation) on the shaft of my

WITH DOBDUN, READY TO START

CROSSING THE HAN;O-PA PASS

cart, remarked that "The great one must be possessed of extraordinary strength to be able to walk like that". I learned subsequently that a horseless Mongol is just about as much use as a seagull with its wings clipped.

The missionaries had arranged that this same old Mongol, Dobdun, by name, should act "boy" for me on the way up, i.e. boil water, peel potatoes, and spread my bedding at night. I liked him very much, but mainly for the sake of his picturesque appearance, for besides being very stupid, extremely lazy, and knowing not one word of Chinese, he had not the foggiest notion as to how to do anything for my comfort beyond getting me hot water, and smiling in a paternal way, when, to relieve my beasts, I got out and walked up the steep places.

By the time we were at the top of the pass, between five and six thousand feet above sea level, it was dusk. We had taken our time over the ascent, an icy wind was blowing, and the scene before us was desolate indeed. Earlier in the day and under normal conditions the traffic here is very considerable. Not so at the time of my visit, for beyond being overtaken by a couple of Mongols trotting swiftly along on camels, who drew rein for a few seconds just in order to pass the time of day, or, more literally perhaps, to put the inevitable question as to our destination, before they flew on again, we encountered never a soul. I had never seen camels trotting before

and they reminded me of leggy schoolgirls fielding at cricket, for they scatter their limbs about in just such an ungainly way.

The explanation of the solitude of the pass was forthcoming and obvious enough later on, when, wheeling into the compound of a Chinese inn, we were told that the whole place had been commandeered by the Chinese troops. It was all very ghostly and mysterious, not to say formidable. Under a bright starlit sky, the wind was blowing a gale, and the prospect of sleeping in the open under such conditions by no means appealed to me. Han-o-pa is a fair-sized village, but it was only after our fourth attempt that we could gain admission to an inn.

The inns, which are to be found only for thirty or forty miles north of the frontier, are similar to all inns in North China. Built of mud, the one-storied sheds line three sides of the compound wall. There are stone posts in the compound to which horses and mules are tied up; in the centre is a collection of carts and bales of hides and wool all carefully covered up, while occupying a corner to themselves a trio of camels was tethered. We entered the main room, the kitchen, two-thirds of which was taken up by the k'ang, a low platform some two feet from the ground, covered with a thick layer of hardened mud or boards, and heated from underneath by means of a small furnace. It is one man's work to keep the fire going. With one hand he pulls

a sort of bellows in and out, with the other he feeds the fire continuously by means of a ladle filled with dried horse-droppings. From this time onward, argol, the Mongolian word for this dried manure, was the only description of fuel I saw until my return to civilisation. There is neither wood nor coal (unless, maybe, the latter is hid from sight in the bowels of the mountain) in Inner or South Mongolia. The k'ang was crowded with Mongols and Chinese as well as a number of soldiers, and I learned that the tiresome boy who had insisted upon accompanying me was regaling the company with a personal description of the foreigner whom he had in tow, more especially how that she had had four shots on one occasion before her pony would let her mount; a feat which seemed to give rise to great hilarity when they saw me—the relation of eleven stone to the size of the pony, I imagine.

In the room adjoining were several Chinese traders, and I had to make my choice between, sharing a k'ang with these gentlemen and the Finn, or sleeping under the stars in the courtyard in my cart. Throwing convention to the winds (one really could not trouble about Mrs. Grundy in Mongolia some five or six thousand feet above sea level with a thermometer well below zero and an icy blast blowing from the snow-covered mountains), I decided upon the former without a moment's consideration, and arranged a sheet of oilcloth with my cork mattress on the top on the

opposite side to that on which the Chinese had already stretched themselves. It was late, and we lost no time in preparing and eating our chief meal of the day. We sat cross-legged on our beds, a low Chinese table between us, while we ate. We were tired, and very hungry, and to save unpacking, I shared my provisions with the missionary. Having travelled a good deal about Mongolia, he knew the people and the language well, and I found him an interesting companion in consequence, delightfully ready to pour information out to so keen a listener as I was. I am afraid that he thought me quite mad to wish to make such a journey from motives other than evangelisation or business, and he told me later that he was greatly surprised at my powers of endurance, and that I could take things as they came with such equanimity. Moveover, at the end of the journey he expressed his willingness to allow me to join his caravan some time in the future on an extensive tour over several months in the western region of the country—which was, I felt, the greatest compliment he could have paid me.

"You won't be able to undress, you know," the Finn informed me, as he nervously watched me divesting myself of my heavy riding boots; for which superfluous information I politely thanked him. I had had no intention of doing so in this motley company. One's toilet on such an occasion was both brief and simple. I travelled

in the only garb possible in that country, a cross-seat riding habit, and at night merely divested myself of my outer garment in order to put on a long sheepskin coat, took off my stock, crammed a fur cap down over my ears, and tried to sleep. I found this last somewhat difficult on those hard, hard k'angs, with a regular orchestra of snores bellowing forth from my neighbours on all sides. The boards do not accommodate themselves to one's pampered body, and I used to wish there were less of me to ache.

It was not much after 4 a.m. when the Mongols woke us next day, and we drank our tea and ate some bread and butter to an accompaniment of much shouting as they persuaded the animals into their harness. There was little inducement to wash, for the top of the Han-o-pa Pass was intensely cold in April, and what tried me more than anything else was the difficulty of keeping the skin on my hands and face in that harsh, alkali-laden atmosphere. Our Chinese companions, who had put us through a perfect catechism before we all settled down for the night, we left still snoring on the k'ang. Our joint hotel bill for the accommodation, and including the tip to the man who sat up all night at the bellows, was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 3½d., but being foreigners, we doubtless paid more heavily than did the Chinese.

Our early start was somewhat discounted by the breaking down of one of the wagons half an

hour afterwards on the most exposed part of the mountain. The wind cut us through and through, and the sight of the snow and ice on all sides did not tend to make us feel any more comfortable. (One learns patience and philosophy in this country, if one learns nothing else.) My beautiful old Mongol presented his advice to the carters as to repairing the wagon, and then proceeded to climb up into the other one, thrust himself deep down amongst the cargo, and drawing all the available covering over his head became, for the time being, lost to view. I quickly adapted myself to my environment and followed his example, thus beginning the day by endeavouring to finish the night, and sleeping in my cart until nearly nine o'clock, when, calling up my pony, I had a delightful ride until our next halt, at tiffin time.

The day had by this time resolved itself into a condition of springlike perfection, and we had passed from the rugged barrier of the Ha-o-pa region to a grassy plateau, finding a good deal of the land as well under Chinese cultivation, crops of wheat and oats just beginning to show themselves above the ground. By their assiduity, their perseverance, thrift, and industry, the Chinese here are persistently pressing onward and forward into Inner Mongolia, year by year a little more and a little more, colonising, and putting land under cultivation, ploughing up great tracts which perhaps the previous year had furnished grazing ground for Mongol live stock, their clusters of

A MONGOL ORTON

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY ON OX-CARTS DRAWN BY PONIES

little mud houses forming landmarks in the bare landscape.

Long strings of ox-carts were here winding their way up towards the mountains—unhappy-looking oxen with a vast amount of endurance, wretched little carts carrying a load of three sacks apiece, weighing from six to seven cwt. They travel very slowly, and on this narrow rocky road they are compelled to stop and make way for everything that either passes or meets them. The creaking of a string of ox-carts, sometimes as many as a 100 to 150 tied to one another, once heard will never be forgotten. The wheels are fixed on to solid axles which revolve with them and the rest of the structure is the personification of simplicity. Held together by wedges, the one thing needful to its well-being is water. Allowed to become too dry, the ox-cart falls to pieces. Kept properly damp, it forms the most serviceable of all means of transport across the desert. The camel for celerity, but slow and sure is decidedly the characteriistc of the ox-cart.

The first camel caravan we saw bearing hides and wool down to Kalgan met us hereabouts. The Mongols at the rate of one to every fifteen beasts, stared and stared at me and my pony, while I returned the gaze with interest. The staying power of camels is proverbial. The caravans in Mongolia march from twenty-five to twenty-eight miles a day, averaging a little over two miles an hour, for a month, after which the

animals require a two weeks' rest when they will be ready to begin work again. Their carrying powers all the same do not bear comparison with the ox-cart. The ordinary load for the Bactrian, or two-humped Mongolian, camel is about 2 cwt. For riding purposes, though despised by the horsey Mongol, a good camel may be used with an ordinary saddle for seventy miles a day for a week in spring or autumn without food or water. The points of this particular species are a well-ribbed body, wide feet, and strong, rigid humps. The female camel is pleasanter to ride and generally more easy-going than the skittish young bull camel, who in the months of January and February is likely to be fierce and refractory. I have heard it said that if a camel "goes for you" with an open mouth, you should spring at his neck and hang on with both legs and arms until some one renders you timely assistance and ties him up. Generally speaking, however, they are not savage. They make as though to bite, but seldom actually do. The female might, in fact would, try to protect her young; and the cry of a cow camel when separated from her calf is as pathetic as that of a hare being run down by the hounds.

It was at a somewhat superior inn we drew rein at midday with the double object of resting our animals and refreshing ourselves. The pleasant Chinese who owned it invited us into his private apartment, a relatively clean room, and it was here that I made my first cooking experiment

on the journey. In a biscuit box, which when we set out contained a dozen eggs, was discovered the early development of an omelette. Weeding the eggshells carefully away from the same, I replaced them by chips of cold ham, thus in course of time producing what I considered to be a dish worthy of the excellent *chef* to whom I had so lately said farewell at the Wagon-lits hotel at Peking.

Alas! for my well-meant effort. The Finn felt extremely unwell after partaking thereof, but in a subsequently confidential moment he explained to me that the omelette had unhappily not harmonised with a vast amount of cake which he had during the morning eaten in the sad intervals of wakefulness while I was riding and he was snoozing in my cart out of the wind. The innkeeper kept us company, of course, during the meal, when he gave us the latest intelligence concerning the movements of the Mongol and Chinese troops. All along the caravan route to Urga, he told us, the Mongols were removing their camps and flocks to remoter quarters for fear of being pillaged; and even down here, little more than a day's journey from the frontier, most of the colonists were ready to pack up their ox-carts at an hour's notice and hurry away to the security of Chihli.

The day, which had begun with so much promise, developed badly, a high wind sprang up from the north, and, laden with alkaline saturated sand

lashed one's face into a condition of soreness. Riding, as we were, straight into the teeth of it, our progress was slow and the hour late when we made for an isolated and miserable little compound in which to pass the night. So few wayfarers had we seen during the day that it seemed reasonable to suppose that we should have the place almost to ourselves; but not at all. A most unholy looking crew of Chinese and Mongols appeared to occupy every possible corner when the door was opened, and we were told baldly that there was no room for us here at all. There was, however, no alternative but to remain, and with a little persuasion on the part of my old Mongol, a few of his fellow-countrymen betook themselves to a less comfortable shed which the innkeeper had considered unworthy of sheltering us. Some of them remained, and there was, of course, nothing to do but to make the best of it. The Finn told me that he thought he could get the Chinese men turned out as well if I liked, but this would have been a desperately unsportsmanlike thing to do, and I felt that one could not possibly allow a missionary so to prejudice his profession. I could see that he was relieved by, and much appreciated, my point of view, which I must say seemed merely an elementary action in "playing the game".

There were some nine or ten of us to share the room, and two of the Mongols looked most awful villains. I always slept with my revolver under my pillow—most people did, I fancy, during

those troublous times—and I was amused at the Finn remarking, "You should put your trust in God rather than in firearms". I told him that I quite agreed with him, but that I had always believed that intelligence combined with a straight eye had been given to us with a view to helping ourselves in tight corners. This same excellent man, be it related, never himself travelled without a revolver in his pocket and was at this time the proud possessor of a shot gun into the bargain. It struck me afterwards that he was not unreasonably a little nervous as to whom I might shoot were I to wake up suddenly frightened in the night. As a matter of fact, the known possession of firearms in such a country is in itself a certain amount of security.

Getting away in the early morning was always rather a business. My stubborn mule had sometimes to be coaxed and threatened alternately for half an hour before he would allow himself to be put between the shafts of the cart, and finally our caravan would get under weigh, disentangling itself from the apparently inextricable confusion of the crowded compound.

Mongolian dogs, roused by the crackings of whips, keeping up an incessant growl, breaking into a savage bark should the unwary visitor venture too near; weary ponies with drooping heads tethered to the stone pillar in the middle; ill-conditioned pigs nosing about everywhere in somewhat hopeless search of provender; and,

as souls apart, the stately camels in picturesque groups looking superciliously on, snarling and snapping as their owners urge them to kneeling posture to receive their loads—such is the composition of the inn compound as one hangs around shivering in the chilly dawn, ready to hoist oneself into the saddle and be off the moment that the caravan is on the point of starting. It does not need great experience in this sort of travelling to be firm in seeing one's entourage set out before one departs oneself.

CHAPTER IV

"Those who know when they have enough are rich"

—*Chinese proverb*

THE countryside at this point, some seventy miles north-west of the Great Wall, begins to lose its cultivated aspect and to develop into great stretches of undulating prairie as far as the eye can see, which would have been ideal for riding had one had no retarding caravan to be kept in view. By this time I had grown quite attached to my pony, for although obstinate, as Mongolians must always appear by comparison with Europeans, he had a very fair mouth and was evidently used to being well treated. The monotony of the plains was broken not far from the last sign of civilisation, Haraossu, a place composed of a temple and a few houses, to reach which we had the excitement of fording a river, the carters making no end of a bother about this. First of all they persuaded one of the younger Mongols to divest himself of his trousers in order to wade out to ascertain at which point the animals would best be able to negotiate it. He walked into the water gingerly enough, the others all pouring advice into his ears at the tops of their voices, and after a

considerable delay and a ridiculous amount of fussing and preparation—the water in the deepest part did not come up to our axles—we got over with great yelling and shouting. The little red pony in my tandem flew over as though demons were after him, nearly upsetting the cart by rushing up the steep bank on the opposite side. My saddle pony went over quietly enough with me on his back, I having reassured him by letting him drink a little water first, and having therefore no difficulty at all.

The last mud hut, a private house—there being no more inns on this side of the Gobi desert—was reached long after dark. It was a truly depressing habitation, the only virtue of which was that it was almost deserted save for an old man and his two sons. They may have had relatively comfortable quarters, but all that they could be induced to give us was the merest little out-house, a lean-to shed, from the roof of which hung cobwebs heavy with the dust of ages. Warmth or comfort there was none. Stacked round the walls and in the corners were harness, primitive agricultural appliances, a collection of fusty bags, and a mass of rubbish. When the dim light of our candles penetrated to the rafters we saw hanging therefrom a number of skins of sheep, goats, etc., some of them quite recently disassociated from their carcasses and in sanguinary condition, as well as a skeleton of what I diagnosed as a cat.

It was a horrible place and so appallingly dirty that one felt desire neither to eat nor rest in it. Packed up on the tail of my cart, however, I carried a canvas camp-bed of which I had not expected to make use before arriving at Ta-Bol. Here it was a great comfort, for at least it raised me above the dust-level of the crowded k'ang, and one did one's best to become oblivious of the surroundings as soon as possible. The owners of the place were evidently very nervous, and a murmur of conversation kept me awake most of the night. They would tell us nothing, however, and pretended ignorance of all that was taking place in the country. Seeing some fowls, we persuaded them with some difficulty to sell us a few eggs, which they assured us were perfectly fresh. To my surprise, however, in applying the test of spinning them round, they whirled like a teetotum, and I learned for the first time of the native custom of hard-boiling them as soon as they were laid.

We awoke to very cold weather next day, and I found to my sorrow that my pony had developed a swollen back and that it would be unwise to saddle him. Starting by leading him, I tied him up later on to the tail of the cart just in front of my own, thinking to keep an eye on him as we followed. But this was too undignified for the game little beast, and with a toss of his head he broke his reins and went off at a gallop, heading for the detestable quarters we had left an hour

earlier. This delayed us considerably, for we had already made a late start owing to my stupid old Mongol first breaking the strap which held my bedding together and then so packing everything into my cart that I could not possibly get into it as well. The entire contents had to be disgorged and re-arranged.

By this time I had got my carters pretty well into shape, and they were beginning to realise that things had to be done in my way, that the cart was mine *pro tem.*, and that I was not out for their sole amusement. In a country where women are wont to take such an entirely back seat it needs time and perseverance to establish this novel state of affairs. As I had foreseen, there being two of them to one of me, they tried in a mild way to bully me by seating themselves on my shafts at the same time, thereby, when I was inside, completely obscuring my view, and putting me on a level with the native women who are neither seen nor heard. It was, too, only by considerable firmness that I established a right to my favourite possession, a large sheet of Chinese oilcloth. My bed was spread upon it at night, when it made a sort of neutral territory between myself and the many insects by which I was likely to be attacked. By day it shielded my baggage from the dust and occasional rain storms, as well as gladdening my eyes when they rested upon its brilliant imperial yellow. Not once but many times did my driver try to annex this

precious oilcloth in order to protect his fodder therewith.

With two of the Mongols who accompanied us for their own convenience, I had very little to do. One of them, a son-in-law of the older man, was a mere youth, very under sized, of seventeen or eighteen, whose wedding, I learned later, was the great event of a few months previously in Inner Mongolia. The father-in-law treated him with much respect and consideration, for the boy is rich as Mongols go, and was returning from Kalgan with saddle bags filled with purchases for his bride; most uncomfortable they must have been, since they pushed out his short legs from the saddle in a most ludicrous way. Starting an hour or so later than we did, they were handed a packet of letters which arrived just after I left, as well as a dollar's worth of stamps. They remembered to give me the letters a day or two afterwards, but I can only conclude that they kept the stamps to trade with next time they visited Kalgan, for I saw them never at all.

Mongols pure and simple inhabited the hut at which we drew rein for our horses' midday rest, and girls with bright chubby cheeks and large dark eyes came out to stare at us. After this between us and the Gobi there was nothing but boundless prairie with an occasional group of Mongol yourts, or tents. The air here was so clear that the eye carried for a considerable distance. Far out on the horizon one may see

objects bobbing up and down, and, like a ship upon the high seas the sails of which come into view long before her hull, these objects gradually resolve themselves into figures, and a couple of Mongols mounted upon camels dawn upon one's view, swinging along at a great pace, the wind at their backs. They are the pioneers of a storm and great clouds of dust are rolling up behind them. The unusual sight not only of a whirlwind, but of a whirlwind walking across the prairie was very striking. It revolves at a tremendous rate upon its own axis as well as making swift progress. In the high wind we found hereabouts, I several times saw two or more solid columns of dust rising high into the air, apparently stalking each other over the plains. Another curious and equally amusing sight was that created by lumps of camel wool, which, becoming detached, are blown along gathering loose dry grass and more wool on their way, gradually forming huge boluses and trundling along in the high wind with an amazing velocity.

We were now in Mongolia proper, and the language of the people we met appealed to me as infinitely more musical and harmonious than the throaty sounds that emanate from the mandarin speaking Chinese. Early in the day we arrived at the home of my old Mongol, Dobdun, and here in his yourt we were evidently not only eagerly expected, but received a very hearty welcome from the wives, a lama priest, brother of our host,

and from a number of young people and children. There were several yourts clustered together, and outside the ubiquitous Tibetan prayer flags fluttered in the wind. As we rode up, we were greeted by a volley of barks from several ferocious dogs, and in Mongolia one soon learns never to dismount until some one from the yourt comes out to control them. When within shouting distance of the settlement at which one wishes to stop, one should stop and call out the word "Nuhuoi" (Mongolian for dogs), which as a rule brings out not only the dogs themselves, if they are not already on your tracks, but the inhabitants of the yourts who are bound by law to control them.

The yourt is an umbrella-like framework of trellis-wood covered with rather thick felt, which when new is perfectly white, and in travelling in cold weather I ask for nothing better than to be housed in one of these. Some 14 to 18 feet in diameter, they are circular in form, having a dome-shaped roof. The door, which is originally painted red, faces always south or south-east. Upon entering the yourt, you are confronted by the little family altar, on which is arranged a Buddha and perhaps several smaller and subsidiary gods, together with sundry little brass cups containing offerings of one sort and another. In front of the altar is a low Chinese table, and round the sides of Dobdun's yourt were some fine old red lacquer chests for clothes and valuables. Most of these

had nice old Chinese locks, but on one of them the Finn recognised an European padlock as his own which he lost when travelling a year ago with this same Mongol. He did not call attention to the fact; it would be of little use, for Mongols pick up and pocket things when the opportunity occurs and think nothing at all of it.

Dobdun's yourt was exceptionally well-equipped. The ground was covered with semi-circular mats of very thick white felt with a device *appliqué* in black as a border. Some handsome skins were also strewn about. The centre of the yourt was occupied by an iron basket of flaming argol, the smoke from which escaped through a circular opening in the roof. Our host, my quondam "boy," being a man of means, had some handsome cushions for his guests to sit upon, and on these we squatted cross-legged. There is a considerable amount of etiquette to be observed in visiting a Mongol family, and the first thing to be remembered is of significant importance. Just as one does not carry an umbrella into a London drawing-room, neither should one take a whip or stick into a Mongol yourt. To do so is tantamount to an act of aggression, and the proper thing is to lay them on the roof outside as one enters. Once inside, the usual palaver, as in China, takes place as to where one shall sit, and it is interesting to reflect how very nearly related after all in some respects our own manners are to those of the Asiatics. It would surely be a very

modern young person who would plump himself into the largest armchair before his elders and betters were disposed of.

To the left of the fire are the seats of the lowly, and the inevitable invitation to "come up higher" necessitates a certain amount of elasticity on the part of those unaccustomed to sink gracefully to the ground into a cross-legged position. Should cramp ensue from squatting thus, the visitor should remember that to sit with his feet pointing to the back of the tent is a heinous breach of good manners. If stretch they must, it should be towards the door, not the altar. On the other hand, if the foreigner divests himself of his headgear, which among the Mongols is not customary, he must place it higher up than, that is, on the altar side of, himself. If the word of greeting has for the moment been mislaid, as in my own case it invariably was, bows and smiles carry one a long way all the world over. Friendliness, but never to the point of permitting the least familiarity, seemed to me in the East to pave the way as a rule.

With their warm welcome, a good deal of curiosity is naturally combined, and I did not flatter myself that it was "love at first sight" which made the ladies of the family so anxious to sit near to me. Again, as the Chinese do, the Mongols like to finger one's clothes, get a close look at our "funny white eyes and light hair," and if one wears a ring, they are as amused as children to

be allowed to try it on. But Dobdun, having had some experience of Europeans was not going to allow his womenkind to over-reach themselves, and their share in the entertainment was to initiate me into the mysteries of Mongol tea-making, and keep the fire going, and then, literally, to take a back seat and allow the superior sex to converse.

Having finally settled into such seats as befitted the relative dignity of the visitors, an interchange of snuff-bottles took place, but in the case of Mongols alone it would be the caller who would offer his to the host and then to the others present. Of all their personal possessions, there is nothing more highly prized by the Mongols throughout the country than their snuff-bottles, which, in the case of rich men, are frequently made of carved jade, crystal, and precious stones. A considerable amount of ritual surrounds the offering and receiving of the snuff-bottle. Our host, however, pandering to our foreign ways, produced his snuff, and I learned from him to receive it in the palm of my hand, lift it slowly to my nose, sniff, and then bowing return it with deliberation to the owner. Dobdun's habitat, I was warned, was not to be taken as an index to all yourts, for the general cleanliness, as well as the quality of the tea there, were vastly superior to anything else I was likely to meet in Mongolia. I was, in fact, being let down very easy in my initiation.

The Mongols are very hospitable and insist upon giving the visitor tea and milk. It is at first a

trying experience to know that good manners compel you to drink from a filthy bowl the still filthier milk which you see taken from a skin bag, made from the "innards" of a sheep, hanging up the side of the yourt, and offered to you by hands which from the day they were born appear never to have been washed. Brick tea, of which there are several qualities, and which in some parts of Mongolia still forms the currency, is made at Hankow from the dust and sweepings of the leaf. It is used throughout the country, and forms the staple drink of the Mongols. It is brewed by shavings, cut from the slab, being pounded up and stewed indefinitely in milk, to which salt and a cheesy description of butter are added.

The relation between the tea and the argol was somewhat too intimate for my peace of mind, and it went sometimes much against the grain to drink from a bowl wiped out by the fingers of some dirty old woman who the moment before had been employed in feeding the fire with the horse or camel droppings. The collecting of argol is a source of constant occupation throughout the spring and summer, when after being spread over the ground in the sun, it is piled in great mounds near the yourts for use during the winter months. It makes a good hot fire and has practically no smell at all when burning. While engaged in endeavouring to drink this saline mixture and at the same time to convey the impression that I liked it,

an elderly man in a loose robe of dark red cotton cloth, his head clean-shaved, rode up, dismounted, and came in. He was presented to me as "my brother, the lama". He was an old friend of the missionary, and they at once entered into an animated conversation.

A particularly handsome small boy with large and merry brown eyes made his appearance soon after, and to my surprise, lama priests being vowed to celibacy, was introduced by Dobdun as "the son of my brother, the lama". The Finn chaffed the priest gently on the subject of the breaking of his vows, whereupon every one laughed, including the illegitimate son, who, a fine lad of twelve or so, had already been dedicated to the temple and was now a lama student. They retaliated, I heard subsequently, by asking the missionary what on earth he was doing travelling about the country with a woman. This might have embarrassed me had I known the language. It is not the first time that I have experienced the blissfulness of ignorance. The lama in embryo and his little sister were quite willing to be photographed later on, and were posed for me by their seniors at their usual occupation—gathering argol.

In spite of Dobdun's constant association with missionaries at Kalgan, in spite of the fact that he knows by heart quite half of the Bible, that he has had every opportunity and every encouragement to become a Christian, he remains as devout a Buddhist as ever he was; and, although interested

A CAMEL CARAVAN

THE LAMA IN EMBRYO, AND HIS LITTLE SISTER GATHERING ARGOL

in the religion of the Western world, he regards it as similar but vastly inferior to his own faith. And so he continues to enshrine his little brass figure of the prophet, and at sundry times he doubtless makes his prostrations, and fills up the many little metal cups with suitable offerings of corn and wine to his god.

Thus my first impression of a Mongol yourt was an extremely pleasant one, and I was sorry at the end of an hour or more to say farewell to my first Mongol friend, little knowing that he had no intention of letting me very far out of his sight and that he would turn up again within the next forty-eight hours in order to present his foreign protégée to his various friends in the neighbourhood. But you never know your luck in travelling, and in seeking shelter for the night you are as likely as not in winter to find a very different sort of yourt. The young calves and lambs share the warmth of the stove with their owners, and, if the size of the family (a very elastic term here) is out of proportion to the accommodation of the yourt, they will all lie down together, well wedged in with their feet towards the fire in the middle, the animals squeezing in where they can.

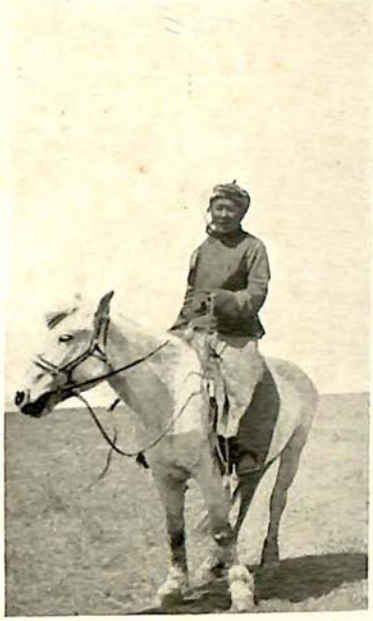
Delightfully drowsy hours in my cart over smooth prairie followed the substantial meal in the warmth of the yourt as we pressed on toward Ta-Bol, when I was suddenly awakened by an unexpected halt, in time to see the Finn dismount at the sight of a couple of Mongols on camels who

drew up to speak to him. The camel-riders made their beasts kneel and they swung themselves out of their saddles to shake the missionary warmly by both hands. By this time a third man riding one and leading another pony appeared on the scene and the four men squatted on the ground in earnest conference. It transpired that they were attached to a great caravan on its way down to Kalgan; that they had already been obliged to go much out of their way in order to avoid the soldiers; and that they would be thankful if the Finn would give them "written words" in case any further effort were made to commandeer their camels. I provided them with leaves from my note-book for the purpose, and the Finn did what he could for them.

Exactly why his words should have weight with Government troops in a country under martial law, I could never quite fathom. Perhaps it was that the soldiers from China and these Mongols from Urga would not be able to speak one another's language—more than probable. These Mongols at all events departed quite happy and apparently much reassured by the missionary's advice. The horseman lent the Finn the capital little pony he was leading. They would meet again before long, he said, and then it could be returned to him. That night I reached the most northerly point of my little excursion into the wilds, and camped out in the vicinity of the only mission in the heart of Mongolia.

CARRYING MAILS

BY THE WAYSIDE



'HE DREW REINS TO TAKE STOCK OF THE FOREIGNER'

Lack of hospitality has never been one of the variety of faults so erroneously attributed to missionaries, but the little five-roomed mud structure which housed two families as well as three or four unattached men and women, to say nothing of an adopted Mongol orphan, had its limitations, and I was not at all sorry to pitch my own tent rather than tax the already overburdened resources of this newly established station. It was but a few weeks after my visit that this little community had to fly for their lives in the face of the pillaging Mongols from the north, and up to the present time there has been apparently but little hope of their returning to rebuild the ruins of their compound, and to resume their almost hopeless task of conversion. Missions in China are making quite unprecedented progress at the present time, owing doubtless in some degree to the prevailing desire for Western education and enlightenment in general. But Buddhism, or indeed any other form of belief, has nothing approaching so strong a hold over the Chinese as Lamaism has over the Mongols, where in every family at least one boy is dedicated from birth to the priesthood, and where lamas are estimated as forming over 60 per cent. of the total male population.

Within hail of this plucky little band I pitched my tent, and for the first time experienced the diversions of life under canvas in what was practically winter and during a gale. Among certain things I lay claim to have learnt at Ta-Bol was

how to appear cheery and optimistic at breakfast time when from early dawn and even earlier one had been engaged in finding out all about the ways and possibilities of canvas during a raging hurricane. The Mongols are an astonishingly feckless lot of people compared with the Chinese who nearly invariably "go one better" and improve upon anything one shows them from the Western world. The first thing that happened when I retired for the night was the collapse of my canvas bed. The "boy," to whom the business of erecting it and my tent had been entrusted, had satisfied his conscience by merely hooking the ends to the bed supports, and had left the sides (literally) to rip. They did. With a tremendous effort, the light blowing out at intervals, I managed to detach the frame from the canvas and begin again. In course of time, and extremely cold, I got into bed. By 3 a.m. I was aroused by the flap of the tent untying itself and making a most irritating noise. There was nothing for it but to wake up thoroughly and make it fast.

I think I could not have been asleep more than half an hour before I gradually became conscious that my tent appeared to be the sole obstacle in the path of a tremendous hurricane on its way down from Urga to Peking, for all the force of the gale sweeping over hundreds of miles of desert seemed to be expending its force upon the canvas. The flap-flap was merely the overture to a grand chorus, and the cords on one side of the tent

suddenly freeing themselves from the pegs outside, the entire place became transformed in the twinkling of an eye into a pandemonium.

The dust was dense and my belongings blew round in it in base imitation of the whirlwinds which had amused me so much during the early part of the previous day. Loose corners of the tent smacked at everything with extraordinary vigour, smashing all that came within their reach and inflicting stinging slaps as one sought to make them fast. Any sort of light was out of the question and chaos reigned for hours. Having made the ropes fast again and, regardless of dust, deposited everything upon the ground with the heavier articles on the top as the only possible expedient, I again made a bid for the oblivion of a final nap. From sheer exhaustion I managed to sleep again even in that storm, to wake up shivering with cold and in a gritty condition of great discomfort. For the rest—every single article in the tent had to be cleaned when the wind went down. Among things I noted during that eventful night was that it is essential when sleeping so near to the bosom of mother earth in winter to pack as many clothes underneath as on the top of one's body in a canvas bed. More than once I woke up in the morning quite stiff with cold.

Life, however, is full of contrasts, and "joy cometh with the morning". At an early hour a missionary called upon me with a pleasing proposition from the Mongols, who, hearing that

I had a gun, thought that it would be a good opportunity to organise a wolf hunt. Wolves are the arch enemies of the Mongols on account of the tremendous amount of damage they do to the stock. The Mongols hunt them with a zest bred of vengeance, and ride them down (at a somewhat severe cost to their ponies, for the pace is terrific and the strain great), finally lassoing them with a loop of raw hide attached to the end of a pole. The wolf thus caught has a poor time at the hands of the revengeful hunter, and I heard horrible stories of the unfortunate brutes being pegged down to earth, jaws bound, skinned alive except the head, and then set free. Of Mongol bravery there is no doubt, but the reason they give for wolves never attacking men in Mongolia is typical of their "bounce" and conceit. Wolves certainly "go for" people in Russia immediately north, and in Manchuria and China immediately to the east and south of Mongolia. The Russians and Chinese, say the Mongols, are cowards and run away, while they, the Mongols, attack the wolves, yelling and shouting.

A certain she-wolf had for some time carried on successful forays in the neighbourhood, and had done considerable damage, not only among the flocks and herds, but had even pulled down a colt quite near to a settlement. Her lair, where it was suspected that she was maintaining a litter of young cubs, had been located on a distant hill-side. Our armament on this occasion was,

though varied, quite insufficient, and consisted only of our service and two smaller revolvers as well as a shot gun. We lacked the essential rifle. The expedition, however, was not wholly unsuccessful. Taking a line well to leeward of the suspected hill-side, four of us with as many Mongols, armed with spades and picks, spreading ourselves out with a view to cutting off the retreat of the old wolf, should she attempt to dodge us, began a silent march over the dried-up grass. We had walked for less than half an hour when, sure enough, the vibrations of our footsteps carried the news of our approach through the earth to the lair, and in the distance we descried the lady, who, while keeping her weather eye upon us, was making off at a swinging lope at right angles to us. If only we had had a rifle! Each of us was ready to pose as a certain shot and swore to the unquestioned demise of the wolf in such a case. A couple of excellent shots from the service revolver scuffed up the dust after her retreating form, and some of us ran at an angle and tried to head her off by shooting in front of her. But pack of novices that we were, she got well away, her tongue no doubt in her cheek, and we watched her regretfully into dim distance.

Hard work was to take place of suitable weapons. The lair was not difficult of discovery. The hill-side was a perfect honeycomb of holes, and we tried several before settling down to the task of a navvy upon the most promising group.

We all took our turn in wielding the two Chinese spades the Mongols had brought with them, and before long we had made a deep gully some eight or nine feet in length and four or five in depth which we fondly hoped would soon disclose the nest. Our disappointment in discovering that we had merely turned up a passage which went off sharply to the innermost recesses of the slope was great, and two of the party threw up the sponge, declaring that the game was not in the least worth the candle. Personally, I had ulterior motives in view, and was nothing loth to getting my muscles into trim by such excellent exercise as digging. To become the owner of a couple of wolf cubs and to take them back with me to Peking and possibly ship them home alive seemed to me very well worth while.

We dug all day, and towards evening decided, on the advice of the Mongols, to try to smoke out the wolves by lighting a fire at another entrance to the group of holes upon which we were engaged. We were certainly rewarded, not by a capture of wolves, but by one of the most wonderful sights I had experienced in the East. Whether accidental or intentional, it was not very clear, but in any case the Mongols managed to start a prairie blaze which ran like wildfire over acres and acres of dried-up grass. It was a wonderful display. Numbers of eagles, harrier eagles, they called them, hovered and hung over the burning expanse, swooping down

with deadly certainty upon any ground game that might run. It was very interesting to watch four of these great birds hunt and chase a miserable white hare which simply had no chance at all.

There is any amount of sport even in this unpromising part of Mongolia; antelope, prairie chicken, and hare offering a welcome variety to the everlasting mutton of the stewpot. It was fortunate that the fire spread in a direction away from the little mission station and the Mongol yourts near it. At night the whole horizon to the west was glowing, and one could see flames leaping high from time to time as they licked up some little bush or scrub, the hillocks becoming sharply outlined for a while and then part of the blaze itself. Had the strong wind of the night before kept up we should have been in a tight corner. It was an alarming as well as a beautiful sight. The relentless progress of the crackling flames was awe-inspiring, and the phenomenal part of it all was that after laying bare some thousands of acres, the whole thing seemed to fizzle out almost as rapidly as it had begun. I gathered that it was against the law of the country to start such fires, but the Mongols seemed to think that it all made for good and that the new grass would have all the better chance by the clearing off of the old.

At daybreak the following morning a couple of us sallied forth once more to the scene of yesterday's excavations, and seeing from the distance

some movement among the upturned earth we fired, to find upon closer inspection that one fluffy little cub playing outside the hole had been badly peppered and that another one had been killed outright. That there were more inside was fairly certain, for a litter usually consists of from five to seven or more. We decided to continue digging operations. After several hours' extremely hard work and a display of great bravery on the part of one of the missionaries who burrowed into the hole, where there might very well have lurked the parent wolf, until nothing but his feet could be seen outside, we came upon a nest of three more cubs as well as a wounded one in a passage leading to it.

The Mongols were delighted with the bag, and clamoured for the pretty soft little creatures whom it went to my heart to destroy. One was spared for me, and I fed it for several days from a Mongol baby bottle—but it died. The baby bottle of the country, I may mention, is the horn of a cow pierced through to the tip, with a teat cut from the udder of a sheep attached thereto. A great many babies whose mothers have died in childbirth are, I am told, brought up in this way. By the time we had finished our labours we had dug a trench of over twenty feet long, sometimes seven feet in depth, to say nothing of various false tracks, in the process of which we turned up several tons of very tough earth, blistered our hands badly, and made a most untidy mess of the

hill-side. Over and above their joy at having given the happy despatch to no fewer than six of their potential enemies, the Mongols were delighted to cut up the wolves for the sake of their livers, which form one of their most highly valued medicines.

CHAPTER V

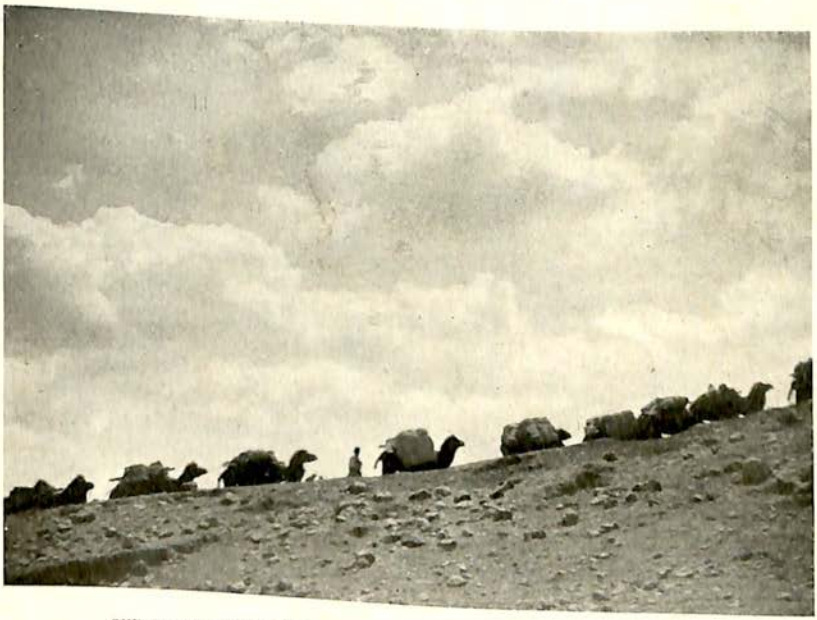
"That the wicked have plenty to eat is no indication of the approval of heaven"

—*Chinese proverb*

IT would be unkind to recommend any sensitive person to make a first experiment in camping out among such a friendly, but inquisitive crew as the natives hereabouts, and I could but be thankful to have served my apprenticeship in this respect in China. After travelling, very much off the beaten track, sometimes for eighteen months in his country, the Chinese, wherever I met him, in Mongolia or in Russia, or in Russo-Japanese Manchuria, seemed far more to me like "a man and a brother" than the inhabitants of any of the latter countries. The casual manner in which the Mongol would walk into one's tent was, to say the least of it, embarrassing; and I have heard it said that quite a little grievance exists among those who from time to time visit Peking for trading purposes or on official business because the houses of Europeans are not open to them as are their hospitable yourts to the traveller in their country.

An old, old man dropped in one day to see me, stone deaf, and dumb. I had been hearing a good

METHUSELAH AND HIS DAUGHTER-IN-LAW



ONE OF THE LARGEST CAMEL CARAVANS THE AUTHOR HAD EVER SEEN

deal and in great variety about their superstitions regarding devils, and when this wrinkled old leather-face, overshadowed by a sheepskin cap black with the dirt of ages, silently approached me in the half-light of late afternoon, it was as though the evil one had materialised. Very thin—there is no soft corner in the Mongol heart, as in the Chinese, for the aged—very tattered, and with bleared eyes, Methuselah gently fingered all my belongings, passing his filthy fingers up and down the bristles of my hair- and tooth-brushes with evident enjoyment. My interest, to say nothing of my astonishment, was far too great for me to think of raising any objection. Poor old man!

Far from being venerated on account of advancing years the old people in Mongolia run a very good chance of being crowded out of their yourts by the younger generation, and left to live or die with no more possessions than a bit of felt covering and a meagre allowance of food on the dust heaps surrounding the settlements.

A son of my old visitor had been a lesser mandarin in this part, but was dispossessed as the result of having been altogether too grasping in his "squeeze" of the soldiers whom he was supposed to pay with money that was provided for that purpose. Four or five fairly well-to-do yourts were the fruit of his ill-gotten gains, and his chief wife, the T'ai-t'ai, showed me with pride her beautiful headdress which she said was worth over one hundred taels, which it was not difficult to

believe. A number of relations crowded into the yourt when I went to pay my call—an astonishingly picturesque crowd in blue, purple, and lavender coats, mingling with the bright orange and dull red of the lamas' habits—all more or less dirty, and some very ragged. The men with their shaggy fur caps and silver-mounted hunting knives, ivory chopsticks hanging in cases, and flint and tinder purses slung on silver chains round their waists or attached to their girdles; the women with elaborate headdresses of the same metal, richly studded with jade, coral, and sometimes pearls, are all really very imposing.

Nothing would satisfy them but that I should go to call upon the little bride of the family and their son, her boy husband. Escorted by the mother-in-law, I made my way to a very new-looking yourt covered with clean white felt and with a newly painted red door. It formed quite a landmark among the others, which were in varying stages of dirtiness and decay. We were received by the young bridal couple, who, arrayed in all the splendour of their wedding garments in my honour, had omitted to tidy up their habitation, which presented a sorry spectacle of thriftless disorder. I gathered that some of the wedding presents had been of a practical nature, for I noticed—incidentally by hitting them with my head—haunches of antelope and joints of mutton hanging from the roof just inside the entrance. The marriage did not seem to me to promise particularly well, for

although amply endowed with such worldly goods as the Mongol heart could desire, the boy and girl, children that they were, seemed distinctly snappy with each other, and each kept his or her own key of the red lacquer chests which contained their respective treasures.

The girl's bridal coiffure was quite wonderful, and back and front her strings of coral and silver chains, with their massive ornaments, reached almost to the bottom of her coat. I noticed that the older women's strings of beads seemed to grow shorter with age, and gathered that, as the girls of the family married, their headdresses were contributed to by the senior generation. A bride, therefore, in a poor family possesses much finer jewels than does her mother, who, like many a mother at home, has been impoverished by the wedding.

The tribe of this region is the Chakhar of South or Inner Mongolia, and owing to the proximity of China they are, I believe, the least pure bred of any. In the main a nomadic people, they move their settlements under normal conditions but twice in the year, the principal object being, of course, fresh pasture for their cattle. They also, however, attach some importance to tradition, and will move their yourts just a few yards sometimes just for the sake of having done so. A fairly well-watered country, the locale of the yourts is to some extent determined by the wells, but the areas are relatively circumscribed, and there is little difficulty in discovering at any given time

the whereabouts of any particular family one may be seeking.

The great lamaseries are necessarily of permanent structure, and fine temples surrounded by a number of yourts and rough houses of Chinese type form villages of considerable size. One comes upon them unexpectedly like oases in the desert. Once a most warlike tribe and foes greatly to be feared by their Chinese neighbours, the Chakhars appear to be now a more peaceable folk than their cousins of the North, and have not, in unison with the Khalkhas, sought to throw off the Chinese yoke with the downfall of the Manchu dynasty. I have heard it said that the Chakhars are cleaner than other tribes, but for the truth of this statement I am unable to vouch; and truly, in view of the fact that it would be difficult to be dirtier than they, I myself find it hard to believe it. Mongols, generally speaking, are an extraordinary dirty people, and one of their superstitions is that if they have too much to do with water in this life they will become fish in the next incarnation. They suffer much from contagious diseases, on account of their habits as well as owing to their lack of morality.

The Mongols are, I am told, some of the most frankly immoral people in the world, and this is not the result of the absence of moral code, for theoretically this latter is of the strictest possible character. The lamas certainly have an extremely bad reputation; certain orders of them are

A TYPICAL CHAKHAR

allowed to marry, but the great bulk of the immense population of priests is nominally celibate. Among the various orders of the priesthood are some whose mission it is to travel about the country to collect money for the temples. When one of these holy men (the greatest villains unhung, would be my honest opinion) visits a settlement he is invited to stay in the richest yourt, given the best of everything to eat, and the chief wife, or, if he prefers her, the daughter, is offered to him as a matter of course. There is no question, I believe, of these women, who belong to the lamas, being looked down upon—far from it. But as far as I could observe and understand, women entering into this irregular alliance do not wear the distinctive and very beautiful headdress of the married woman.

Lamas throughout Mongolia have their heads clean-shaven, and in this region their ordinary dress consists of long tunics of coarse cotton in varying tones of terra-cotta and yellow, bound round the waist with sashes of dark red, as well as long folds of the same material which, worn ordinarily across the chest, are on ceremonial occasions and whilst officiating unwound and used in shawl fashion. Even were there no other distinguishing feature between the Mongol and Chinese, by their boots you would know them all the world over; clumsy, loose-legged affairs, coming two-thirds of the way up to the knee, the dignity of the Mongol is very greatly diminished

if he has to walk or run in such a footgear. Toes upturned, the sole is thick and cumbersome, the boot fits nowhere at all, and the walk degenerates into a shuffle in consequence. For purposes of differentiation the laity are called black men, their hair being worn in long handsome pig-tails, the front of the head shaved in Chinese fashion. I was present on the occasion of the inauguration of the first Parliament of China's Republic in Peking in the spring of 1913, when the Mongol representatives, three of them from Inner Mongolia, were conspicuous in that ultra modern and newly cropped assembly by their *queues*, by their high boots, and by their old-world satin-brocade, fur-trimmed coats of a richness and quality now seldom seen in Peking.

Men and women are extremely fond of dress and ornaments; the former run to beautiful and valuable snuff-bottles, elaborate decoration of their hunting knives, tobacco pouches, chopsticks, and flint and tinder boxes. Extremes seem to me to meet in the cherished possessions of an old Mongol mandarin. He showed me with much pride an up-to-date rifle, a splendid pair of Zeiss field-glasses, and then his flint and tinder box.

Ta-Bol, the meaning of which, "five mountains," suggests a somewhat distorted view of the slight elevations which surround it, proved to be a pleasant centre for my short sojourn in the Chakhar country, and I managed to get a variety of experiences into the time I was there. In a north-

westerly direction and distant some 60 li from Ta-Bol lies Hankarawa, an important citadel of lamaism and the largest temple of Inner Mongolia. In perfect weather and over the most delightful riding country imaginable, with a good track across undulated prairie, an early start was made in order to have plenty of time on arrival. My star seemed in the ascendant, and it was truly a lucky day that I chose for the expedition.

Forming a suburb to the lamasery were half a dozen or less yourts near the entrance, and these I found on closer inspection were primitive little stores kept by the Chinese for supplying the lamas—who here, as in most other places, do no work at all and produce absolutely nothing for their own use—with the necessities of life. The courtly owner of one of them pressed me to enter, when he at once offered me the best tea that I had had since I left South China. In stumbling phrases, I expressed my appreciation and enquired whether the tea was not from the Bohea hills of Fukien. This let loose a flood of conversation (of which, I must confess, I hardly understood a word), out of which I disentangled the fact that my host had come from that province and was delighted to speak with one who knew and admired his native city, Foochow. As to paying for my entertainment, they scouted the idea, and when I departed I felt that at least I had now one friend in Mongolia.

As I approached the entrance to the place it all

seemed abnormally quiet and deserted. I knew there were hundreds of lamas there, but no one was about and not a sound was to be heard. It was all very mysterious. It was not until I had tentatively opened many doors and peered into the gloom of sundry temples, in one of which a very old lama sat quite alone, droning his prayers in the Tibetan tongue, clashing a pair of cymbals and beating a big drum with his hands and feet respectively all at the same time, that I heard sounds as of clapping and applause. I found them difficult to locate. Chancing on the entrance to an unpromising looking and, as far as I could see deserted, compound, I leaned my weight against the great painted wooden doors, which giving way with a loud creak, precipitated me most unexpectedly into the midst of an unlooked-for entertainment. My own surprise can hardly have been less than the combined astonishment of some two to three hundred lamas, ranging from little boys to old hoary-heads, all squatting on the ground in the sunny forecourt of a temple.

My sudden appearance with a camera in their midst was apparently most disconcerting, and one and all they covered their heads with the dark red sashes. To take a snapshot on the spur of the moment was literally a reflex act on my part, and had my life been at stake in the doing of it I could not have refrained. As it was, for a moment or two perhaps the situation was a trifle strained, and whether my intrusion would be

TWO OR THREE HUNDRED LAMAS SQUATTING ON THE GROUND IN THE SUNNY FORECOURT OF A TEMPLE

HANKARAWA

resented, as it might well have been in that out-of-the-way corner of the earth, was exceedingly uncertain. Scowls and anger were expressed all too plainly on the debased faces of many of the younger men, but at a sign from one of the leaders they seemed quickly to recover their equanimity, resumed their occupation, and offered not the slightest objection to my presence, when, by signs, I asked permission to walk round the outskirts of the gathering.

The deep red, vivid orange, and pale cinnamon of their clothes suggested great borders of parrot tulips ranged on either side of a wide flagged path leading up to the chief lama, who quite possibly had seen, what probably few of the others had, white faces visiting the temples in Peking. He allowed me to take a photograph at close quarters, smiling (at his own cowardice, I presume) the while. The little boys made hideous faces at me as I strolled round, and the young men of twenty or so, an age at which I always feel there is most to fear from devilment and cruelty, looked at me in an unmistakably hostile manner.

A little group of men stripped to the waist formed the centre of operations, and these it transpired were candidates for a degree. They were being examined by the seniors and cross-examined by their junior colleagues of all ages. Each side backed its fancy apparently and all indulged in wild clapping and gesticulation, some of them rising from the ground in their excitement

and yelling approbation or the reverse to the victim of the moment. The brown-faced old chief lama sat suave and imperturbable throughout. The scene was as picturesque as it was interesting and fraught with mystery.

Soon afterwards the assembly dispersed, and, freed from the restraint of their elders, the young lamas hustled round me in an aggressive and pugnacious sort of mood. I have found in my limited experience that to meet this kind of thing good-humouredly, but never to show the least sign of embarrassment, usually has a placating effect. I allowed one or two of the more objectionable youths to look through my camera, for instance, but when one of them wished to take it from me for a closer inspection I smacked his hand away as I would have done a child's, whereat they laughed. Not more than five per cent of the uninitiated seem able to see anything through the lenses of a camera, but if one or two can be made to do so the others are placed at a disadvantage, which, to some extent gives one the whip hand.

In the same way with the Chinese. On rare occasions I was faced with the type of swanking young man who conceives it to be his mission in life to make the foreigner "lose face". He usually begins by calling attention to one's limited knowledge of his language, but I succeeded more than once in turning the tables by enquiring if he knew "English talk," French talk," "Russian talk," and so

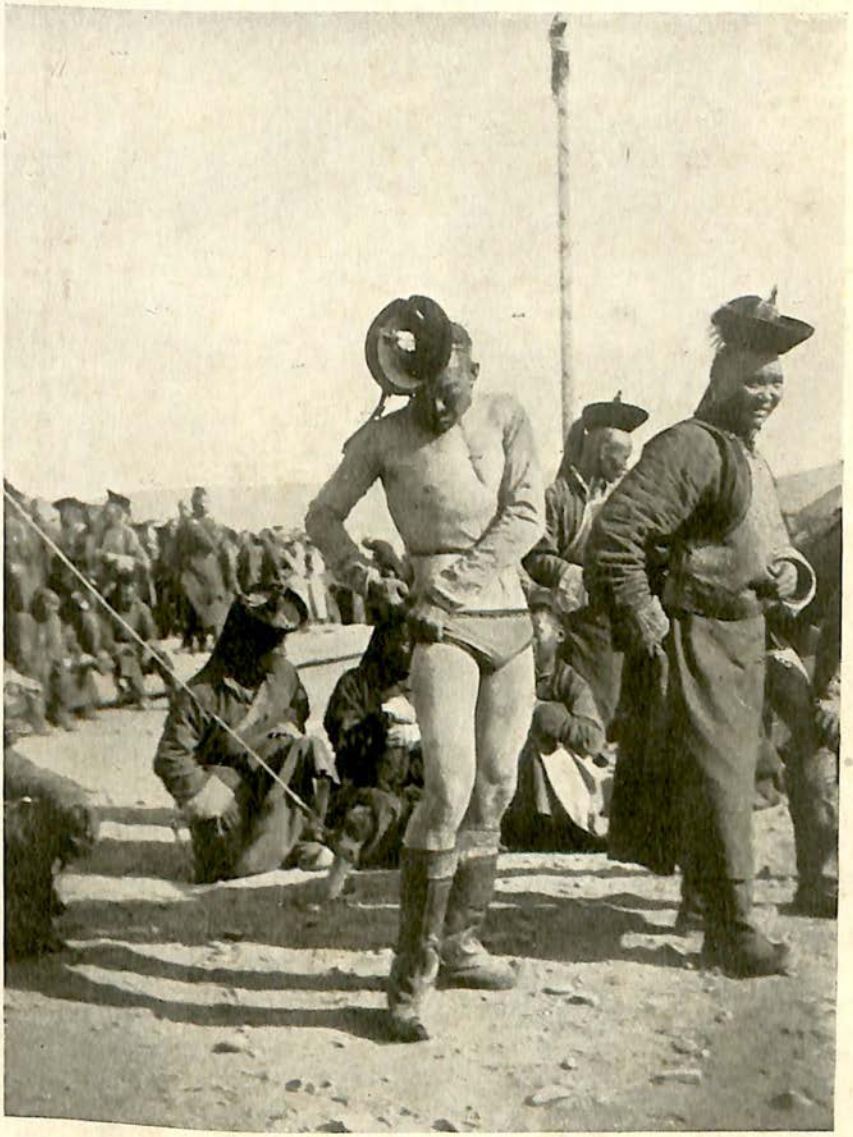
forth. A contemptuous shrug of the shoulders and an expressive movement of the hands, with a well-there-you-are look on your face, and the crowd laughs with you, while the swanker retires to reflect on the fact "that they don't know everything down in Judee".

On one occasion in Mongolia it became essential for me to assert my position. The lad who had insisted, against my wishes, upon accompanying my caravan up country (I discovered afterwards that he was actually the owner of and alone could manage the pony which helped to draw my cart) declined to carry out my instructions in some small matter or other one day, and, moreover, when I insisted, he was cheeky, imitating me in the way I spoke Chinese almost before my face. This could not, of course, be permitted for an instant. I waited my opportunity, and later in the day on returning from an expedition I asked a missionary to explain his misdeeds very carefully to him, and to help him to realise that though I might not be able to speak his language I did not intend to stand any nonsense from him. I stepped in at the end of the harangue and seizing him by the pigtail I administered the severest chastisement I have ever given, boxing his ears soundly several times. The crucial question had arisen. Was I to lose face, or was he? I have to admit that I was not "hitting a man of my own size," but the effect on the Mongol onlookers was excellent, and as for the lad himself—well—he and I and a

young Mongol spent the greater part of next day together hunting for eagles' eggs, far away from the camp. That I taught him the approved Western method of blowing eggs with one hole only (some of them were in an unpleasantly mature condition) sealed our relationship, which remained friendly until I left China.

One romantic evening in South Mongolia comes back to my remembrance in Europe as it were in a dream. I had arranged to accompany my old friend the Finn on a visit to a distant settlement in order to see whether these people there with whom he was totally unacquainted would give him a hearing at all. After a ride of some twenty li or so, we arrived late one Sunday afternoon at a group of tents sheltered from the north and easterly winds by a belt of low hills, and came to a halt a hundred yards away from the most important looking yourt with a shout of "Nuhuoi".

The people emerged from the surrounding tents and restrained the very savage dogs who were howling for our blood. Women controlled them, kneeling on the ground and holding them in by their collars. The moment the dogs see that strangers are given a friendly reception there is no more trouble with them until the time for departure comes, when the same performance has to be repeated. The owner of the yourt we had selected for our visit was a Mandarin of some standing, and his fine manners greatly impressed me as he offered us the snuff-bottle in the most



A MONGOL GLADIATOR

courtly fashion imaginable. With him was a very handsome man who might from his gentle and learned appearance have been—what one likes to imagine they are—an Oxford don. This was the Mandarin's secretary, and having lived from time to time in Peking, he had acquired something of the culture and refinement of the Chinese upper class. Through him, the Finn addressed most of his remarks to the Mandarin who was keenly entertained until the subject of Western religion was broached, when he completely changed his aspect, becoming palpably indifferent, if not a little sulky, remaining with us only because good manners compelled him to do so.

People from neighbouring tents swarmed in, crowding and jostling each other at the entrance in order to catch a glimpse of the foreigners. The atmosphere became not a little thick, the doorway being absolutely blocked up by a solid little mass of humanity, little faces even peering in between the ankles of the older folk. A motley crew indeed, the sun streaming in like a brilliant shaft through the hole in the roof, the rest of the interior in deep shade, the colours of their clothes and the whimsical faces of the people making altogether a fascinating study. The Finn suggested that I, as a new-comer to Mongolia, would like to hear some of the music of the country, and there was a great pow-wow as to who should perform for my benefit. After a prodigious wait, two young lamas disappeared,

soon to return, the one with a long multi-stringed instrument of wood distantly related, perhaps, to the zither family; and the other bearing a banjo-like affair provided with four strings.

In the dim light from the setting sun, and with a shyness charming to behold in these usually somewhat truculent youths, they twanged their strings in pretty little minor chords, and from time to time one of them would sing quietly and very bashfully of the prowess of his historic forebears. The singer of the settlement, a girl, was, I gathered, too shy to appear at all. It was all so weird and barbaric, so remote from life as I had known it, and so extraordinarily like a dream. The Mongols, as I learnt during my months in Peking, are totally unlike the Chinese in their relation to music. While I was in Peking the last of the Manchu empresses departed from the disturbed life of her country, and the lamas, of course, played an important part at the funeral ceremonials. Grouped in a little temple-like structure to one side of the platform upon which the obeisance to the memorial tablet of the dead empress was made, some forty or fifty priests in brilliant togas of Imperial yellow satin intoned a solemn dirge which was absolutely in harmony with the atmosphere of mourning. Many people who deny entirely the least suggestion of musical sense to the Chinese were, I remember, greatly struck with the extraordinarily deep and rich tones that came from the Mongol throats in their Gregorian-like chanting.

CHAPTER VI

"The best riders have the hardest falls"

—*Chinese proverb*

THE people in the neighbourhood of Ta-Bol were quite a friendly lot, and I was frequently invited to go and have a chat in the various yourts. To persuade one inside and therefore to be at close enough quarters to enjoy a thorough inspection of the foreigner's clothes, hair, "light eyes," etc., was a source of much enjoyment to some of the younger women, and turning a blind eye, that *sine quâ non* of all good travellers, upon the dirt and disorder, I managed to see the people under more or less normal conditions, which one seldom succeeds in doing when journeying with a definite goal and object. In some of the yourts, each one, it seemed to me, dirtier than the last, were delightful babies, confiding little creatures who had never known harshness, some of whom wore really beautiful charms of jade and lumps of amber round their brown necks, which nothing could induce the mothers to sell, for fear of jeopardising the fortunes of their little ones. From what I saw of them, both in the north as well as in the south, I came to the

conclusion that the youthful Mongolian, until he arrives at such an age to be dedicated to the vicious life of the lamasery, is a particularly happy little person. The boy baby dominates the yourt as much as he dominates the palace, but I imagine his little sister has a rather fairer chance in life than she often enjoys in the Chinese family. At any rate, I never saw a child being ill-used in Mongolia, and to hear one cry is of rare occurrence. Families all over Mongolia are, I am told, small, and in one yourt when the mother of twins was presented to me as a somewhat phenomenal person, she apologised for the fact and said, "The foreigner will regard me as being like a dog to produce two children at one birth".

Upon returning one evening to my camp, I found that the local Mandarin had sent across one of his camels in response to a remark of mine that I had never ridden one. The natives, I think, expected a fine entertainment, for there were several unwonted loafers hanging about the compound. The camel looked a nice gentle young thing, and we took to each other at first sight. At a word from the man who brought her, she knelt in order to receive me in the saddle, which was the usual sort of Mongol affair with very short stirrups. Having neither reins nor bridle is at first disconcerting, but I was assured that it was simple enough to steer with the single rope of camel's hair which is attached to a wooden pin running through the cartilage of the animal's nose. I was lucky in not

coming off at once, for it takes a little experience to remember that in rising, hind legs first, the camel pitches you forward against the front hump and then shoots you back again when the fore-quarters of the creature come into position. I had no intention, however, of making merry for the Mongols, and blithely declining to be led (I somehow trusted that camel), I started off at a gentle pace, wondering how on earth I would stop her should Madame la Chamelle take it into her head to run away with me.

Days of see-saws and swings are to me a still cherished reminiscence. I by no means disliked the undulating motion which to many people recalls the Dover-Calais boats, and, gaining assurance, I dug my heels in and essayed a gentle amble. Madame obliged me, and we were, I fondly believe, mutually satisfied, when I, becoming rashly familiar upon so short an acquaintance, used a word I had learned from the Chinese when riding a donkey along the dusty roads near the Imperial summer palace at Peking. "Dôk, Dôk," I gaily remarked to Madame, merely (and quite unnecessarily) to suggest that she should pick up her feet and not stumble. I forgot that her scholastic attainments included only her mother tongue and that she did not know the Chinese language. The effect was striking in more senses than one. She came to a sudden standstill and with a tremendous heave shot me on to her front hump as she plumped down upon her knees. It

was but by the mercy of providence that my neck was not broken, and that with the second movement reversed I regained my seat. Fortunately we were well out of sight of onlookers, but my confidence was badly shaken, and it was only when it occurred to me that "Sŏk, Sŏk," was the expression of the Mongols when they wished their camels to kneel to be loaded up that I felt forgiving and able to forget the little misunderstanding.

The expression of a camel's face is always one of supreme contempt. Camels remind me of certain elderly and aristocratic spinsters who, possessing no money and but little brain, have one asset, their social superiority. But I like it all the same, breeding in camels or spinsters either as far as that goes.

During the whole time that I was at Ta-Bol rumours came daily to our ears of the increasingly disturbed condition of the country, of fighting that had taken place or was expected to take place at no very great distance. The missionaries were warned by the authorities that they must hold themselves in readiness for flight at an hour's notice, and that they would be wise if they lost no time in sending their women and children into regions of safety. A trio of Chinese officials were located somewhere in the vicinity, and the utmost secrecy was observed in regard to their movements while the general atmosphere of unrest and nervousness prevailed.

It was not difficult to see that if I wanted to

carry my whole scheme into effect, which was to return to Peking, make my preparations, and start again at once for Europe by way of the Gobi and Siberia, I had better lose no time. This little expedition was merely by way of a preliminary canter in order to gain experience for the more ambitious journey right across the desert, as well as to test my capacity for really rough travelling and primitive living. My journey back to China promised to be a lonely one. I should this time have neither Finn nor Mongols riding with me for company, but merely the two Chinese who were daily becoming more uneasy and restless at the news from the north, and who were pestering me with enquiries as to when we were to return to the safety of Kalgan.

Disliking anything savouring of monotony and being, moreover, interested in the possibilities of Inner Mongolia from the European point of view, I decided to go back to Kalgan by a different route from that by which we came. I had heard in Peking of a large horse-farm financed by a small syndicate in China, at which lived a solitary German overseer, a long day's journey to the south-east of Ta-Bol at a place called Dol-na-gashi. I was told that this would be interesting to visit.

Although it was only early May, I had on the whole been most fortunate as regards weather during my trip, but at the time of my proposed departure a typical Gobi gale sprang up and delayed me for a couple of days, during which time

it was impossible to do anything at all. The only satisfaction I had was that all my belongings were packed up and out of the dust.

My Chinese driver demanded money before starting; he had apparently run up a bill with some Mongol, for fodder, he said, and he would not be allowed to go before he paid up. I had stayed away longer than my servants had anticipated, the original arrangement being that half their total hire should be paid down at starting, and the remainder handed over when they delivered me safe and sound in Kalgan again. I certainly believe that it added considerably to my safety to travel very light as regards money: I took with me but a few dollars. I was careful now to give my men money enough only for their immediate necessities, and to retain the whip hand by keeping the bulk of it until the end of the journey. I am afraid that we were a somewhat surly trio as we turned our backs upon Ta-Bol and set our faces homewards in the icy wind and stinging dust. The Chinese were annoyed at having to make this détour by—to them—an unknown route, while I have to admit being rather "under the weather" myself.

A Mongol rode with us some distance to put us in the right direction for the horse-farm, and before nightfall we arrived at a substantially built and very comfortable bungalow, planked down in the middle of interminable prairie, upon the borders of an extensive shallow lake which

provided resting place for numbers of wildfowl. Surrounding the bungalow were yourts, and long, low stables, in which I learned later the magnificent Russian stallions who were to improve the breed of Mongol ponies were housed. Concealing his astonishment at the unexpected appearance of an European lady at his door, the German overseer, speaking excellent English, gave me a most cordial welcome. The interior of the bungalow contained all the comfort of a farmhouse in Saxony, and glad I was to stay there for a night, and thus to reduce by one the number of uncomfortable inns to be experienced on the way back to Kalgan. After the ugly, undersized though serviceable little Mongol ponies to which one had become accustomed, the magnificent horses—Russian crossed with German, if I remember aright—looked like giants. Their powerful build with short arched necks and small heads was very dignified indeed, and for the first time in all my wanderings I felt a suggestion of homesickness as I looked at them, and wondered how far the development of the motor-car would have gone to oust the horses which are seen to greater advantage in London during the season than anywhere else in the world.

A bunch of 500 Mongol ponies scattered about the prairie was the material with which my host had to work. He had not, he told me, so far had particularly good luck with them owing to sickness amongst the mares, and he did not seem to think

that the immediate prospects as regards financial success were any too rosy. One point about this horse-farm that interested me particularly was that with all their horsey proclivities, their vaunted horsemanship, and general prowess, the German overseer preferred to employ Chinese to Mongols as infinitely more reliable with the animals in all respects.

We made an early start next day. The weather had cleared again. A handful of cigarettes between them transformed my Chinese into the cheeriest and most considerate companions. Previous to this they had been, perhaps, rather rubbed up the wrong way—most unintentionally, I am sure—by first one person and then another conveying instructions to them. But now that they were solely responsible for me and to me, no one could have behaved better. Once succeed in giving your Chinese employee a real sense of responsibility and you have one of the most trustworthy men in the world to deal with is not only my own experience, but that of men who have lived half a lifetime in China. Those, indeed, who live there longest like them best. I have long since come to the conclusion that as far as is practicable with virtually no knowledge of their language the more one manages one's native servants oneself and without assistance the better one will hit it off with them. As soon as ever the third person intervenes, misunderstandings, ill-temper, and disagreement result.

I was certainly pleased with my drivers when they told me that if I did not mind cutting tiffin and the midday rest, they thought that they could take me to a distant inn where I should be much more comfortable than at the obvious halt. Nothing loth, and quite content with a diet of walnuts and dates, since that was all that was accessible in my cart, we travelled for twelve solid hours on end. The men were in high spirits, shouting "Whoa, whoa," to the animals (which in Chinese topsey-turveydom means of course "hurry up"—I was taken in by this every time) and cracking jokes all day, because, as the Yankees say, they "felt so good". It was certainly a hard day, and at the end of it we met, what to me was a never-failing joy, one of the largest camel caravans I had ever seen. Slowly climbing up over the horizon it loomed between us and a gorgeous sunset, gradually dawning upon our vision as it came swaying along in the golden haze, richly dressed Mongols lolling easily upon the camels' backs. There must have been over 200 camels and sixteen or eighteen men, all fully armed, riding them, bright patches of colour in their blue, purple, or priestly red.

So completely was I absorbed in this beautiful picture that I did not notice, neither apparently did the men, that we were approaching the compound of an inn on the off-side, until suddenly our leading pony made a tremendous dash right through the middle of the caravan across the track,

scattering the camels and causing something of a stampede. The little brute was hungry and had no intention of allowing a few camels to stand between him and his supper. The camels, who are only loosely roped together in order to save their pierced noses should any untoward incident, such as a stumble or cast load, occur, spread out in all directions, and for the moment the air was rendered sultry with Mongol execrations. No harm was, however, done, and every one laughed at the d'hivilment of the fiery little red pony. But our destination was not yet, and it was long after dark when we arrived "at the haven where we would be". A long parley at the gateway of the inn filled me with fear that we were going to have trouble in securing accommodation, but after much wheedling on the part of my pock-marked Chinese, we were allowed to enter, and without a word from me some men were turned out of a room in order that I might have it to myself.

The lad whose head I had so severely smacked but a few days previously behaved admirably, setting up my bed, fetching me hot water, and then staying to see me eat my supper. It was only by presenting him with the greater part of a leg of mutton (I detest old mutton!) that I got rid of him at all. Alone for a short spell, I settled down to a hearty meal composed of the various remains in my food box, and hurried off to bed with the uncomfortable recollection that the boy

had held up four fingers as indicating the hour at which we were to start, or at least at which I was to be called, on the morrow. Expecting to reach Kalgan within twenty-four hours, I bestowed certain articles of food upon the coolies who stood round watching me pack up next morning, and was amused to see that my men got a *quid pro quo* for anything I gave away. A copy of "Punch" was the means, I observed, of purchasing fodder for the red pony from the inn proprietor.

Another somewhat strenuous day brought us to the top of the Han-o-pa Pass, and by the time we reached the heights the colouring was superb. Purple and pale blue mountains pushed through a misty atmosphere, the sun shone brilliantly, and great masses of clouds shed their deep shadows over the gateway to North China. It was here that the road from Dolo N'or joined our caravan route, and we had indeed the evidence of our own eyes that the fighting of which we had heard so much was no mere myth. We overtook ox-cart after ox-cart escorted by small detachments of Chinese soldiers, bringing down knapsacks, accoutrements, and caps belonging to the poor Chinese who had fallen to the splendid marksmanship and dash of the Mongol troops at the battle of Dolo N'or. The Chinese are much too thrifty (and poor) to allow their caps to be buried with the soldiers. More than once, too, we saw some miserably wounded officer being carried down that terribly rocky pass on a rough stretcher.

One man had had to pass the night at the last inn at which I stopped, and it was pitiful to see the agony he suffered in being lifted on to his stretcher again. He had been badly shot in the lower part of the body, and I am sure he must have wished that he had been killed outright. People say that the Chinese are insensitive, and that relatively speaking that they do not suffer. One thing I know about them is that some of them have the power of self-control very wonderfully developed. As to their sensitiveness to pain, I should not like to speak, but I am very certain that it is rash to generalise.

It is strange what a haven of comfort and security one's headquarters, however temporary, become for the time being, and my last day on the road was marked by the now-we-shall-soon-be-home feeling. By way of a final experience, we encountered for three hours over the highest part of the pass the thickest dust storm that it has ever been my lot to see in the East. So dense it was, that covering myself up completely with the oilcloth I cowered as far back as I could get in my cart, and breathed in air which might have been caused by a practical joker with a bag of flour, while for safety, as well as out of sheer humanity, I gave my motor goggles to my perspiring driver. Appearances do not trouble me much off the beaten track, but the whole of the day following was devoted by myself and a "boy" in trying to drive the dust out

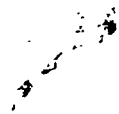
of the riding kit which I had worn in the storm, and even from the few things which were carefully packed away in a small box.

The descent from the heights some fifteen miles north of Kalgan was one of continuous jolt, joggle, bang-joggle, bang, jolt. One wheel would mount a time-worn boulder, linger a second on the top, and slide off with a gulp into the soft sand. The other meanwhile, would execute a "pas seul" on a rock newly disintegrated from the mountain side. Packed even by an old hand well versed in Chinese travelling, everything breakable got broken on my journey down over the Kalgan Pass, and even the sides of my books were ground against each other until the cardboard showed through the cloth covers. As for my camera, my cherished old Kodak which for over fifteen years had served me well and in many countries, and which especially in Mongolia had given me cent per cent of good results, I did not mean to let it get broken if I could possibly help it, and I saved its life by carrying it slung round my neck so that it rested on my chest, thus providing a certain amount of resistance against the jarring. The reason of this somewhat excessive destruction was that we came down the mountain side at top speed, reckless as to driving, in order to reach Kalgan before the closing of the city gates.

Away down on the level all our troubles were forgotten in the compensating peacefulness of shelter from the wind. The road along the Kalgan

valley was very beautiful, very soothing, and full of incident. The rugged mountains roünd us were bathed in the soft warm glow of sunset, the shadows closing in behind us fell in rich violet tones. The trees, which little more than a month ago had been bare, were now fully clad in their daintiest, freshest green, and what had been a frozen river-bed was once again a running stream. Many men and boys watering their horses greeted my drivers, and incidentally myself, as heroes who had deeds of daring done, and welcomed us as travellers returned in safety from a distant and dangerous land. The Chinese are horribly afraid of the Mongols.

A PASTORAL SCENE



CHAPTER VII

"With coarse food to eat, water to drink, and the bended arm as a pillow, happiness may still exist"

—*Chinese proverb*

SO greatly had I enjoyed my experiences of travel in Inner Mongolia, that it was in a sanguine frame of mind I returned to Peking to engage in the pleasant task of making my preparations for a more extensive expedition. I had not, however, been long in the capital before I received from an authentic quarter news which made my prospects of carrying my plans into effect look somewhat dubious. Confirming the rumours I had heard at Ta-Bol, a Reuter's telegram was published to the effect that a battle in which 1200 Chinese soldiers had been routed had taken place immediately north of that place, and that the Hung-hu-tzes, once a robber band, now authorised Mongol soldiery, were plundering within a few hundred li of Kalgan, and killing Mongols and Chinese without distinction.

The next thing that happened was that one afternoon at the British Legation, forty-eight hours only after my return from the north, I met Mr.

Edward Manico Gull, then of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, who, like myself, undeterred by the question of risks, was keenly desirous of crossing the Gobi and of visiting Urga with a view of learning at first hand something of the political conditions which led up to the rebellion of Mongolia against Chinese rule. A few days later he propounded the very practical suggestion that it would be decidedly economical, and, what was of far greater importance, very much safer, if we joined forces in order to make the attempt. Plans then grew apace. Mr. Gull left for Kalgan almost immediately, and spent a weary fortnight in making strenuous efforts to secure first camels, and then a Mongol to accompany us as guide. Only people who have had this sort of experience can realise the constant disappointment, the promises, the breaking of promises, the endless procrastinations and delay that attend an endeavour to persuade the Asiatic into doing something concerning which he has misgivings—it resolves itself into a perfect see-saw of anticipation and disillusion.

At extortionate rates, camels were commissioned over and over again; a southern Mongol undertook the duties of guide. When the time arrived for their appearance there were no camels. The Mongol backed out of his bargain. For my part, I undertook the purchase of stores—a somewhat unknown quantity, for under the unsettled conditions of the country it was wise

to be prepared for all emergencies, such as dodging the fighting forces, which conceivably might mean making a détour taking weeks. I also bought a capital pony—alas! only to sell him back again to his owner a few days later. But I at Peking was less sanguine than my friend at Kalgan. The little experience I had already had of Mongolia had taught me something of the difficulties of the situation, and by then the frontiers were so tremendously guarded that there was never the ghost of a chance of getting out of China nor of our caravan going through the lines.

To the kindness of certain friends at Peking at this time I owe more even than perhaps they realise. Plans had of necessity to be kept private under the circumstances, and the sympathy as well as the practical assistance in preparing my outfit that were given to me in the most generous manner possible by the two people who were in my confidence can never be forgotten. But to cut a long, and to me a heartrending, story short, we had, after straining every nerve to achieve our object, to abandon the notion of crossing the Gobi, and, travelling by train in the most prosaic manner possible through Manchuria and Siberia, we arrived at Verkne-Oudinsk on the Eastern side of Lake Baikal. The journey thither, had not the vision of all we had missed in being forced to cut out the Gobi from our calculations loomed large on our horizon, would have been very interesting. As it was, I broke my journey by

the South Manchurian Railway for twenty-four hours in order to see something of the old capital and metropolis of Manchuria, Moukden, while Mr. Gull travelled on to spend a few days with some friends at Harbin.

Moukden attracted me on several counts. I wanted to see with my own eyes something of the effect of the Japanese influence (the line from Peking to Ch'angch'un is Japanese) on the Chinese in Manchuria, as well as to visit what had been the scene of great slaughter during the Russo-Japanese war. Most of all was I anxious not to miss the opportunity of inspecting the small but fine collection of Ch'en Lung pictures which interested me deeply. These, together with an enormous collection of porcelain, are kept, thick with dust and but rarely seeing the light of day, in the old palace, the ancestral home of the late dynasty, perilously exposed, it seemed, to danger from fire, but perhaps safer as regards looting than they might be in China proper. One of these days one fears that a needy Government, if it continues to sail under Republican colours, will cast its predatory eye on this mass of treasure, and a long purse from the United States will replenish the coffers of the iconoclasts at the expense to the nation of some of the most precious heirlooms of the faded monarchy, the priceless possessions of Ch'en Lung the magnificent. The tombs of the Manchu sovereigns a few miles out of the city also helped to convince me that it had

been well worth while to break my journey at Moukden.

From Ch'angch'un to Harbin one travels under Russian auspices on the Chinese Eastern Railway. Never in all my experience have I arrived at a more depressing place than Harbin, some eighteen hours' journey on from Moukden. Never have I felt more of a stranger in a strange land. Chaos reigned among the cosmopolitan crowds on the platforms, and I was in despair at securing my luggage before the train went on. A friend in need, in the person of a hotel porter, came to my assistance after I had effected the whole business myself, and haled me off to the dreariest hotel it has ever been my lot to enter. Of mushroom growth consequent on the opening of the Siberian Railway, there is little that is attractive in Harbin, and it was depressing to find that Russian holidays, when all shops are closed, necessitated remaining there for several days in order to make final purchases. I could find no redeeming feature in Harbin, although it was there that an extraordinary piece of good luck befell us. In a dismal tea garden, Mr. Gull and I were using up a great deal of energy in the endeavour to persuade a Russian waitress to provide us with bread and butter, when a handsome old man turned round and in dulcet tones said, "Would you like me to interpret for you?" We did indeed like, and still more did we enjoy the conversation that ensued. We learned that our

friend, a much-travelled man, had been in Urga, and was therefore able to give us most valuable information as to the means of getting there. In the kindness of his heart, he even presented us with introductions to a Russian who had it in his power to be exceedingly useful to us, but who unfortunately was absent from Mongolia when we arrived there. This kindness on the part of a perfect stranger was truly refreshing, not to say inspiring.

Leaving Peking as we had done by so entirely different a route from that we had projected, we had been unable to provide ourselves with the permits necessary for carrying firearms in Russia. The Russian customs are the bugbear of trans-Siberian travel. Even when all is in one's favour, passports duly *viséd*, every detail *en règle*, endless difficulties are apt to crop up, and sad and varied are the stories with which passengers regale each other of lost luggage, missed trains, and other uncalled-for troubles, one and all resulting from—shall we say excess of zeal?—at the customs. The Russians still seem to think that they are doing one a favour in allowing one to travel in their unattractive and expensive country, in which I for one certainly encountered more sheer discomfort than in any other place I have stayed in.

The settlement, it is scarcely worthy of being called a town, of Manchuli is separated by some forty-eight hours' journey from Harbin. It is solely of importance as being the Russian frontier, and is

the scene therefore of all that is exasperating in connection with customs. It was here that we anticipated trouble with our guns, revolvers, and ammunition. But good fortune was beginning to shine upon us, and owing to a little kindly advice from another casual acquaintance, we experienced no difficulty at all. We had been warned that if the guns were too much in evidence they would unquestionably be confiscated and that imprisonment without the option of a fine would result without doubt. Stories of the awful dungeons on the Volga floated through my mind.

My gun, therefore, was taken from its case (the latter being sent back by post to Peking) and the three sections wrapped up and packed among the underwear in my trunk. The ammunition, I was advised, should be so distributed as to give no clue to its presence. This was by no means an easy matter. Over a hundred rounds packed away into a tin jug and basin, with walnuts placed on the top, were made into an untidy brown paper parcel. The remainder was carried in a haversack. It being generally agreed that the less likely of the two of us to be suspected was myself, I undertook to do my best to perpetrate the deception. Underneath my Burberry I slung the Mauser pistol and a large Colt revolver; my smaller weapon I carried in my pocket. The ammunition for all these I had also spread about my person. Outside my coat was the haversack, the strap concealed round my neck, and in order

to suggest the lightness of—food, shall we say?—I carried this jauntily on the tips of two fingers. The total was somewhat weighty, and I felt for all the world like a Gilbert and Sullivan pirate.

The examination of my small trunk was to me a nerve-racking performance. To present a bland appearance to the officials who conducted the search was, under the circumstances, rather hard. Layer after layer was lifted out, but when on the verge of disclosing my disjointed gun the generalissimo in command stayed the hands of his underling and all was well. But it was touch and go.

Upon our box of stores we had fully expected to pay duty, since everything entering Russia is liable, and a few days previously I had been told of a lady travelling home by this route with her baby being charged full price on sixteen tins of milk which she had purchased for her journey. But the officials were content with the turning out of the entire contents of the box, when finding that there was no one article in sets of dozens, they were good enough to pass the lot through without charging us a penny.

The remainder of the journey to our destination, Verkne-Oudinsk, was pleasant enough by the ordinary trans-Siberian daily express, and without incident worth recording. There was no restaurant car, but the station buffets all along this route are excellent, and in taking advantage of these for meals we were able to husband the

contents of the food box for Mongolian emergencies. We drew up at more or less suitable times for meals thrice daily, and soon learned to accommodate ourselves to these or to go without altogether. At the buffets we found capital food at very reasonable prices, and it was usually cooked to the minute of the train's arrival. At wayside stations too, we were able to buy wild raspberries in any quantity, but never were we able to hit these off at the same station at which we bought beautiful cream—the equivalent of about half a pint for a penny. Food on such a journey (there were about fifty hours between Manchuria and Verkne-Oudinsk) plays no unimportant part, and for the sake of those who fear lest they may go hungry should they have the courage to travel other than by the *train de luxe*, I will just mention in passing that the little spatch-cock chickens fried in egg and breadcrumb, after a liberal helping of the famous Russian Bortsch (which indeed is a meal in itself) make a dinner hard to beat. Travelling second class for economy's sake—for we were in utter ignorance as to how our financial resources would hold out in Mongolia—our travelling companions were mainly Russian officers and their families, and from time to time a couple of priests of the Greek Church would get in. But one of all these knew any language other than his mother tongue. To find the wonderful linguists with which Russia is usually accredited one must go, I fancy, into the

society of Petersburg or Moscow. This particular linguist, a priest, had lived in America. The conductors on the trains, though civil enough, spoke Russian only. The well-equipped wash-rooms at the end of each compartment were dreadful traps for losing things, and an unpleasing coincidence occurred when we discovered the loss of our respective watches both on the same day.

They were undoubtedly stolen. Mine was less easily explained than that of my fellow-traveller. For less than two minutes he had left it on the edge of the lavatory basin, and on becoming aware of this second loss it seemed that the time had come for complaint. Complaint in Russian, however, is not so easy when one does not know one word of the tongue, and we resorted to the primitive method of drawing the watch, and then making pantomimic enquiries of our companions—at that time a couple of priests and the two sons of one of them. It was one of these latter we had reason to suspect, and going sternly up to them, I brandished the drawing in their faces and demanded the watch. The father broke out to our astonishment in voluble English, and assured us (what parent would not have done?) that his were good little boys, and would not think of keeping the watch had they found it. Our surprise was even greater when the second priest produced his cigarette case, opened it, and disclosed the watch. He presented it to me with an unctuous bow, explaining that not knowing to whom it belonged he

had retained it. I am afraid that we must have mingled incredulity with our gratitude, or perhaps his uneasy conscience smote him, for he pulled forth a large crucifix from his voluminous garment, kissed it sanctimoniously, held out his hands to both of us, and before we had time to realise the situation kissed first one and then the other of us amid great protestations of honesty. A most revolting person.

CHAPTER VIII

"Whom Heaven has endowed as a fool at his birth it is a waste of instruction to teach"

—*Chinese proverb*

OUR real difficulties had, however, barely begun, and it was upon arrival at the Hotel Siberie at Verkne-Oudinsk that we felt completely at sea in the absence of one word of a common language. Reaching our destination late at night we had the greatest trouble in making them understand that we were hungry and wished to have supper before seeking our rooms. Eggs, we thought, would be the simplest and most easily obtainable fare. I therefore drew an egg. What they did *not* think it was meant for can hardly be described; that it was an egg never occurred to them. Certainly an egg drawn in a hurry might be many things. Therefore I added an egg-cup to my sketch; and at this they stared in blank astonishment. I think they had never seen such a thing. I then tried to draw a chicken; at which they laughed, but had no conception as to my intention. With all the resourcefulness of the superior sex, Mr. Gull had a brilliant notion. Out of all patience—he is a peppery little man—he

pointed to my picture, and, violently flapping his arms, he squawked "Cock-a-doodle-doo" at the top of his voice. Delight on the part of the staff. The demonstration had penetrated their thick skulls, and we had eggs for supper that night.

Next day our intention was to find out all about the steamboat which was to carry us up the Selenga River to Kiachta, but how to encompass this was almost an insurmountable problem. The clerks of the telegraph office had been our solitary hope, but on acquaintance we found that this means was worse than useless. They knew not one word of French, Germān, or, of course, English. We wandered, somewhat disconsolate, along the dusty streets, wondering what we should be able to do, when, when coming away from a private house, we encountered the amiable countenance of a Chinaman. We seized upon him, and our troubles were, for the time being at least, at an end. What he did not know himself, he put us in the way of finding out, and retracing his steps into the house he invited the master thereof to come forth and to speak with us. This gentleman turned out to be a German-speaking Russian engaged in one of the more important businesses of the place, and of his kindness we have the most grateful recollection. He helped us to order dinner, he walked with us, and drove with us. He took us to the steamship company's office, purchased our tickets, and finally put us and our luggage on board the "Rabatka," waving us

farewells from the wharf like the good friend that he was.

Verkne-Oudinsk is not a place of many attractions. Once a penal settlement, now a military stronghold, its main feature is the huge white prison standing on the banks of the Selenga River a short distance outside the town; it seems out of all proportion to the population of some 40,000 inhabitants. This prison is capable of containing 600 men and women, and in some of the rooms there are as many as seventy persons herded together. Criminals of the worst order, as well as those prisoners who have escaped and been recaptured, are isolated, confined in dungeons, and wear fetters on their ankles. Of Verkne-Oudinsk's 40,000 inhabitants some 10,000 are said to be Chinese, while of the remainder an appreciable proportion is no doubt composed of Russian political exiles and ticket-of-leave men with their families, or their descendants.

In relation to the size and position of the place the shops of Verkne-Oudinsk are fairly good. There are also a couple of factories, while a brisk trade is carried on at certain hours of the day in the big market square. Considerable business is transacted in Verkne-Oudinsk in connection with skins, fur, wool, and timber. The first-named are, however, exported in their raw condition and therefore not a great many people are employed in this trade. As in most Russian towns, the church forms the dominant feature, and that in

Verkne-Oudinsk, with its copper-green roof and white walls, is decidedly attractive to the eye, standing as it does, on the banks of a flowing river.

The houses, mainly of wood, and often composed of rough logs with the bark remaining, are for the most part of one story and border the roads on which the dust is habitually ankle deep. The only possibility of comfort under such conditions is to wear the long soft top boots of the country. Yet it is only the men of the place who do so, and the women for the most part go about in trodden-down slippers and with shawls over their untidy heads.

The weather was by this time growing hot, and the prospect of two days' travelling on a river steamboat sounded exceedingly pleasant after the shadeless, dust-laden streets of Verkne-Oudinsk. But we had reckoned without the mosquitoes. The "Rabatka" can hardly be called a luxurious boat, and the vibration and noise from the paddle-wheels were at first not a little trying. The cabins, arranged with three hard, velvet-covered seats in place of berths, were very small, while the necessity that arose for the thick wire-gauze screens over the windows as soon as the sun went down, rendered them almost unendurably hot. There was a roomy upper deck upon which we had fondly contemplated spending all our time, but alas! the funnel emitted, not smoke, but a continuous rain of red-hot charcoal, and in view of the danger from fire there was, of course, no awning.

The scenery, which was mildly pretty as we passed between the pine-clad hills outside Verkne-Oudinsk, soon became flat and uninteresting. Selenginsk, the only village of any size and with the usual large white church with green domes, was passed about half-way between our starting-point and Ost-Kiachta, and may be remembered as having been during the early part of last century the field of a group of English missionaries who established there an excellent work among the Buriats (a Russian-nationalised tribe of Mongols). They lived there in complete exile until Nicholas Imperator ordered them out of the country in the early forties, the reason being that it was English influence and not the Christianising of the Buriats that was feared by the authorities.

Delightful indeed it was to reach the little port of Ost-Kiachta in the cool of the morning, to make a bad bargain with the owner of a tarantass, and to find ourselves driving along through country which was in refreshing contrast to that we had recently left—stretches of flowery moorland bordered with pines and silver birches. At one point across a shallow valley drifted sounds of melody, which, we discovered later, arose from the tents of an encampment of Russian soldiers. This part of Siberia, in fact, bristles with bayonets, and the ulterior motives of massing such numbers of soldiers in territory so obviously peaceful is significant enough. We must have driven for some ten miles or more when we dashed through

TROITZE CASAVSK

OUR BURIAT HOSTESS

THE JAMSCHIK AND HIS TARANTASS

the gay little town of Troitze-Casavsk, in which churches and barracks seemed to dominate everything right up to the door of the unpretentious, one-storied, barn-like erection which called itself the Hôtel Metrôpole.

The place presented a depressed aspect, and the bedrooms, like cells, opening off a long and odoriferous passage, were far from cheering. The washing arrangements, just a trickle of water coming from a tin receptacle of doubtful cleanliness fixed above a basin, and the sheetless, blanketless beds were by no means inviting. The landlord, however, a portly Serb, was a pleasant enough fellow, and sent us in an appetising lunch, which, after our picnicing experiences on both boat and train was welcome. Kiachta, of which Troitze-Casavsk is merely a division on the northern side, we found to be a far more interesting place than Verkne-Oudinsk. A great military centre, with newly-erected barracks of strikingly ugly design and capable of accommodating over 15,000 soldiers, mars the foreground of what would otherwise be a most charming view extending as far as the eye can reach into Mongolia.

A ribbon of no man's land divides Kiachta from Mai-mai-ch'eng (buy-sell city), a pretty little Chinese township which fringes the northernmost border of Mongolia opposite Kiachta—the neutral territory being defined by a couple of stone pillars on the strip of dusty waste. But Russia has long ago broken the laws of neutral

territory by the establishment of barracks within five miles of the frontier, and Mai-mai-ch'eng is depressed. They are very depressed indeed, for the Russians are pressing the Chinese very hard here, and, while the latter doubtless squeezed the Mongol to the limits of his endurance, they in their turn are being ground down and out of existence by dues and taxation on both incoming and outgoing goods, in face of the special protection which is afforded to all Russian products. The Chinese were very ready to talk about their grievances, and we sat in their little shops and drank excellent tea, in Russian fashion, in vast quantities one hot afternoon while they poured these grievances into our sympathetic ears. Chinese, Mongols, and Russians live cheek by jowl in Kiachta, but all told, apart from the military, the total population numbers not many more than a thousand souls.

It is here in Kiachta that one first makes the acquaintance of the Khalkha or Northern Mongol. In the streets, in the market place, in the burning heat where the sand refracts every atom of glare, they are to be encountered. Always mounted, they presented the most extraordinarily picturesque appearance, and the first impression fascinated me. One couple, an elderly rake and his pretty young wife, we followed about while they made their purchases. The girl, sitting easily and gracefully on her pony, bartered for things at the various stalls, while her elderly

swain doled out the roubles with a cheeriness which made me think that she must surely be the wife of "the other fellow"—it certainly was not marital. At a Chinese booth she drank, what looked like, sherbet, made an awful face over it, whereat Don Yuan laughed derisively. Riding astride, she appeared both eminently practical and unpractical at the same time—the curious spreading coiffure looking as though it would catch the wind to any extent when she was going fast. This seemed to me as though it might possibly have been the forerunner of the Manchu headdress which strikes one as being so attractive the first time one sees it in Peking. The typical Mongol swagger, of which later we were to see plenty, was not absent from the pair, and the maiden evidently enjoyed our interest, and was, moreover, quite coy about it.

How to get away from Kiachta was a problem somewhat difficult of solution. Wild rumours regarding the turbulent soldiery and the Hung-hu-tzes, or "red-beards," as these murderous robbers are called, sent up the prices alarmingly. By an European we had met in Verkne-Oudinsk we had been told that our route might be infested by such, and that on meeting a bunch of mounted men in Russian boots and slouch hats we were to shoot at sight and not to wait for them "to plug the lead in first". Hung-hu-tzes have the reputation of killing first and robbing afterwards. How sound this advice may have been it is difficult to

determine now, for fortunately we never had occasion to put it into practice. Through the kind offices of a solitary Dane in charge of the telegraph system at Kiachta, to whom we were lucky in having an introduction, we were able to come to terms with the owner of a tarantass. The latter is a rough cradle-like, hooded structure, virtually springless, on four wheels, drawn by three fiery horses, driven by a Jamschik or Russian coachman. For sixty roubles (nearly £7), ten of them in advance (which we inadvertently forgot to deduct when we got to our journey's end), our ruffianly looking driver undertook to convey us to Urga, but, he said, owing to the rivers at this time of year being in flood, he would not guarantee to do so under a week. From my point of view this was no drawback; lingering on the road enables one frequently to obtain an intimacy with the local conditions which hurrying through against time and under contract completely frustrates.

I was glad to shake the dust of Russia from my feet for a while and depart from the hotel which at 8 o'clock on this perfect summer's day was still slumbering and slothful. Evidence of the previous night's debauch sufficed to make breakfast in the dining-room an unattractive experience, and it was not a place in which one cared to remain longer than absolutely necessary. A charge in our bill of something over five shillings for a cooked cauliflower was proof enough that the

Russians love money though they do not love work. Rather a Mongol yourt at any time than an Hôtel Metrôpole in Siberia. Civilisation, so called, is all very well, but more often than not it destroys simplicity while in no sense augmenting comfort.

CHAPTER IX

"The Great Way is very easy, but all love the by-paths"
—*Chinese proverb*

THE sheer discomfort of our crowded tarantass could not quench the glorious optimism with which on the last day of June we sallied forth on the highway to Urga. Our driver, though he looked a ruffian, was not unpromising on further acquaintance, and we ended up by liking him very much. On the day previous to our departure he had called to see exactly how much luggage we wanted to take with us, and this he was inclined to limit severely. Needless to say it had expanded considerably during the night, and we cudgelled our brains as to how to get it into the tarantass without exciting his criticism too much. The Jamschik was all smiles in the morning however, and took no notice as package after package was stowed away. The awful thought passed through my mind that perhaps he was in league with the Hung-hu-tzes and felt that the more the stores the better the booty. We were far too crowded to be comfortable. Experience, however, had taught us that in due course one shakes down to anything, and

anyhow we were feeling altogether too pleased with life to worry much at this juncture. With us, surrounding us, and suspended above our heads from the roof of the tarantass, making hard corners and lumps when we tried to sit on or lean against them, were our food supplies for the double journey (which as regards time limit was exceedingly vague), a modicum of personal baggage, our bedding, and, not least, our cameras, firearms and cartridges. The weapons had to be so arranged as to be immediately available. We had but one desire—to get to Urga.

The tarantass was drawn by three horses abreast with a fourth tied up and trotting alongside always—in the way, poor little chap, being crowded up banks when the road narrowed and coming in for the sharpest cuts from the long whip on account of his ill-luck every time. Our last stop, long before we had shaken down into anything like comfort, was at Mai-mai-ch'eng, just across the frontier, where we had hoped to lay in a stock of cigarettes, to purchase fresh bread, and to post final letters. But, Russian influence prevailing, Mai-mai-ch'eng had not waked up, the post-office and bakers' shops were still shut, and our sole catch was cigarettes. Once out of Kiachta and through Mai-mai-ch'eng we were actually in Mongolia proper, speeding over undulating country on tracks rather than on roads, driving across flowery prairie, having said good-bye to all civilisation and houses for the time being. At

midday we fetched up at the first Russian rest-house, a new and therefore fairly clean log-hut, and congratulated ourselves upon the prospect of simple comfort when a blue-eyed, blue-bloused young Russian produced the ubiquitous *samovar* and made for us even here tea the like of which you can get neither for love nor money outside Russia. While we ate our lunch the Jamschik amused himself by detaching and thoroughly oiling the wheels of the tarantass, a business which delayed us considerably and which it seemed to us might very well have been performed before we started.

The day which had begun so well grew dull, and grey clouds turned into steady rain which made us anxious as to what the night might have in store for us. Through pretty country, grassy and well sprinkled with flowers, a small species of scarlet and yellow tiger-lily growing in abundance everywhere, we drove on for four or five hours before pulling up in a torrent of rain at dusk, at an unexpected shanty surrounded by three or four yourts out of which several Mongols promptly appeared. On further acquaintance we came to the conclusion that they were Buriats, but be their nationality what it may, they gave us a warm welcome; the woman who appeared to rule the roost there did her best to make us comfortable, dusting the rain from us and even going so far as to wipe the mud from Mr. Gull's mackintosh with my sponge

which I had unfortunately unpacked a thought too soon. The family appeared to be extensive, both numerically and in size. They all helped to carry in, and were eager to unpack, our belongings. The good lady soon had a *samovar* bubbling cheerily and a fire crackling in the mud stove which occupied quite a third of the floor space. She conveyed to us, entirely by pantomime and we afterwards verified her statement that she had once been in the Russian consul's service, that she was a Christian—there was an icon in the corner of the room to which she pointed—and that therefore she loved us very much and would do anything she could for us.

The men brought in a goodly supply of wood—it was cold even in the early July nights—and then stood and gazed at us solemnly. The entire family and many friends from the neighbourhood entered quite unceremoniously from time to time to have a look at us. They would walk straight in, stand and stare for a minute or two, finger anything that attracted their notice, and go on their way. Not so the little boys, of whom there were three or four, who refused to leave us and from whom, while they were picking up little bits of food, we tried to pick up a word or two of Mongolian. The sheep and goats too, squeezing together under the eaves, tried to enter each time the door was opened, and would have crowded us out had we not been firm. As it was, they kept up a melancholy "Baa, ba-a," throughout

the greater part of the night. There was here, of course, no Kangue, and following our Jamschik's example, we spread all the available clothes and rugs upon the floor. I lay awake for, it seemed to me, many hours, the men snoring on the other side of the stove, listening to the rain beating down, and thankful to be in such relatively comfortable quarters. Before 7 a.m. we were up again, spreading our hard biscuit with blackberry jam (how I regretted not having insisted upon taking over the commissariat department and buying bread!) and drinking our cocoa as hot as possible in order to warm ourselves. The children came in for the dregs, in return for which they did their best to teach me to count up to six in their mother tongue. I do not think that their own knowledge went beyond the figure.

It had rained all night and continued to do so all the next day, and the night following that again, and we were not sorry when our Jamschik intimated to us that we had better for the moment stop where we were. We knew that we had shortly to cross a river, and when he raised his arms above his head and said "Ura Gol," we rightly concluded that the river, swollen high, was impossible to negotiate. Besides, next night might, for all we knew, mean camping in the open, and this under the present conditions of weather was by no means enticing. We had a very lazy day, writing a little, reading and talking, playing with any small Mongols who happened to put in an appearance.

By the following morning the river was said to have gone down sufficiently for us to cross, and we were well under weigh by 6 a.m. in none too promising weather. The Ura Gol was not far off, and we crossed the rushing waters by means of a flat-bottomed barge pulled over by wire hawsers. We all crowded together on our tarantass, horses, and men, paying the Mongols who thus transported us about three shillings for their trouble. The banks were flat, and there was nothing to charm the eye in this part of the river or in the bleak and hilly landscape over which a watery sun was making a futile attempt to shine. By tiffin time we had accomplished our third stage and drew up at a mud hovel depressing to a degree. The heavy rains had partially destroyed the roof and the floor was in consequence a morass of filth. There were living here in melancholy exile three or four unkempt and murderous looking men, and a very unhappy woman with three little boys clinging about her draggled skirts—miserable and dissolute Russians upon whom the hand of fate had fallen too heavily to admit even the faintest ray of hope upon their horizon. There is something peculiarly pathetic in the sight of the reversion to this condition of animal existence by people who have obviously at some time or another belonged to civilisation. What they lived on here was more of a mystery than how they lived.

The day had cleared to a perfect brilliance, and

the world seemed a cheery place as we ascended from the mosquito-ridden and marshy valleys and wended our way among the hills to the highlands. Coming over a long and somewhat tedious pass, a tremendous view rewarded us at the top of the climb—an immense plain, ascending by gentle slopes to the mountains, a ribbon of wheel-tracks running across it. It was evening when our Jamschik suddenly turned in his seat and, pointing with his whip, shouted out something as unintelligible as it was exhilarating. In the twinkling of an eye we seemed to be transplanted into another life. There, right at our feet, was a huge Mongol settlement, girdled about on all sides by the low-lying mountains. Numbers of yourts, clustered in twos or threes, formed the centre of great activity. Colour, form, and motion were literally rampant. What in the distance had looked like ant-hills with ants swarming around them turned out to be the yourts surrounded by cattle and flocks. Brilliantly dressed Mongols galloped around in every direction; hundreds of horses were scattered about in herds over the foothills. The men were rounding them up for the night. From time to time some wayward little beast would break away from the rest, proposing to spend the night in mountain solitude. A gaudy stalwart would dart off after it, standing in his stirrups, leaning well forward in his saddle, reins held high in one hand, while in the other he trailed behind him what looked like a fishing-rod

ending up in a loop of raw hide. With a twirl of his wrist he would bring this flying round at the right moment, and lasso the pony with great adroitness, hauling it, subdued at once by the tightening thong, back to the herd.

Nearer the camp, the women coped with the gentler cattle and sheep, and by the time we arrived numbers of cows were tethered with their calves reluctantly allowing a modicum of their milk to be diverted from its natural destiny. The milking of a Mongol cow is less easy than it might appear. The latter has far more character than that cow which is confined to the proverbial three acres, and on no account will the Mongol bovine yield up her milk until her calf has had its whack. I have seen them myself arching up their backs and persistently refusing to allow one drop to be drawn.

"We shall be able to get new milk here," rejoiced my travelling companion, to which I replied, "The newer the better," and foraged for a jug among the contents of our food basket. He was all for buying some from the pail of a laughing maiden who was drawing freely on the teats of a cow tethered near by. I, however, having been brought up for so many years under the direct jurisdiction of those who frame the public health laws, did not fancy the milk that had filtered through dirty fingers into a still more questionable sheepskin pail. I therefore waded in on my own account, and, tin jug in hand, walked up to the

nearest cow, laughing and joking with the Mongols who crowded round me, oblivious of a murmured protest in connection with my "appalling cheek" from Mr. Gull, and proceeded to milk her. But no, the cow did not see the joke. She declined to be milked by an impertinent foreigner. I turned to another, a gentler creature, who was quite willing. The Mongols greeted my attempt, my successful attempt, I may proudly add, with the utmost hilarity, and my jug was half-full when —what I thought was—a furious old woman pushed through the ring, and gave me very plainly to understand that this was her cow, and that if I stole any more milk she would set her equally furious dog, which was barking loudly at her heels, upon me. The other Mongols urged me to continue, and soundly rated the old—man, I discovered him to be—on his lack of hospitality. To them it was a stupendous joke, and so popular did the incident for the moment make me that I might have milked every cow in the place after that had I wanted to. My companion, while strongly condemning my action, drank the milk with keen appreciation—"Adam"!

In the meantime, Mr. Gull and the Jamschik had fixed up our quarters for the night. A handsome young lama had pressed the hospitality of his yourt upon us, and intimated that the only other occupants would be himself and the maiden who appeared to be attached to him. There were from thirty to forty yourts on the plain, some clean

A RUSSIAN SAMSON SEPARATES THE COMBATANTS

THE LAMA AND HIS MAIDEN

and new, others filthy and in the last stage of dilapidation. Ours was reasonably clean, and the felt, with an effective decoration in black for a border, was in good condition. As I returned from my milking exploit, the lama beckoned me to enter, and as I did so, mindful of my manners, I laid my stick on the roof above the door. To my surprise, the priest picked it up and brought it inside—he evidently thought that such a handsome foreign stick would be too great a temptation to his enemies. A great fire sending forth volumes of smoke was blazing in the centre of the yourt, and I found my fellow-traveller suffering greatly in consequence as he struggled with our baggage and the unpacking of the food box preparatory to the evening meal. We had arrived at a satisfactory division of labour—the culinary side, which included "washing up," fell to my lot, the unpacking, repacking and cording—which had to be done with great thoroughness—was carried out by my companion. The great tip in a smoky yourt is to squat on one's heels and so keep one's head out of the smoke which rises at once to the roof leaving the ground more or less clear.

Half a dozen Mongols besides our host and hostess came and sat on the opposite side of the yourt as we spread our supper in front of us. They boiled the water for us and I made tea, when a happy thought struck me. I poured out two mugs full of tea, added plenty of sugar and milk, and rising, we handed them respectively to

the priest and to the girl. They were delighted, and the others chortled at the unexpected good manners of the foreigners. They rose to the occasion at once, poured the tea from our *mugs* to their *bowls* (for which I was thankful), and, turning to the pail of milk behind them, filled the mugs and gave them back to us. In phraseology journalistic, "an excellent impression was produced".

After supper, in total ignorance as to the rules of procedure for going to bed in a yourt, we walked about and watched night falling on the camp. The fierce guard dogs were let loose, and we were left alone with two or three little lama boys who never ceased pestering us for cigarettes. Then we turned in; our rugs and waterproof sheeting spread along the periphery of the yourt in order to catch all the air that was moving. They had evidently been waiting for us. The lama entered soon afterwards, and undressing to the extent of only divesting himself of his long coat and boots disposed himself quite near to my head and was soon sound asleep. By and by, the little girl crept quietly in, and pulling off her great boots with their embroidered tops of black and green, she curled herself round like a kitten at the priest's feet, and with sundry little grunts settled down for the night. Shortly afterwards, the deep silence of the wilds was unbroken save for the snores of our trusty Jamschik, whose hefty form lay stretched across the entrance to the yourt.

I lay awake for some time trying to realise the

strangeness of my environment; trying to realise that I had attained the desire of my heart for the moment—primitive life among an unmistakably primitive people—realising alas! too well, that the freshness and novelty of all things wear quickly away in the face of one's amazing adaptability to the immediate requirements and realities of life. Then gradually, with that easy exaggeration that attends the semi-conscious condition, I dawdled off into the land of the wildest dreams, becoming merged into that essential factor which is common to all existence, be it primitive or civilised—sleep.

Dawn broke amazingly soon it seemed to me, and by 5 o'clock we had spread our breakfast in the pale golden sunshine on the grass outside the yourt. By degrees the settlement awoke once more. The camp was alive again. The women drove the flocks hither and thither suckling, their babies at the same time, astonishingly picturesque in their wonderful headdresses of hair flattened out into the shape of rams' horns, finished off with long plaits, at the extremities of which were suspended coins, as often as not of Russian origin. There was again a great deal of tearing about on ponies, and one could but admire the splendid horsemanship as the men sorted out their animals and drove them to browse upon fresh pastures. After breakfast, I watched our hostess of the previous night making little cakes of koumiss, which she did by squeezing the thickened mares' milk through her grubby little hands. She presented

me with a cake, and watched to see whether or no I would eat it. As she finished them she placed the cakes on a large bamboo sieve and put them to dry in the sun on the roof of the yourt. If one could dissociate the taste from the appearance of the fingers that had made it, the koumiss was not at all bad, and reminded me strongly of a certain cheese which, but a few years ago, promised long life wholesale to mankind on the dictum of a great name in science. I should have liked to remain there for weeks, and we left the settlement most reluctantly. That one experience alone made my visit to the East worth while.

CHAPTER X

"I would that I were as I have been,
Hunting the Hart in Forest Green,
With bended bow and bloodhound free,
O that's the life for Joy and me"

—*Scott*

THE wisdom of an early start soon became apparent when we were obliged literally to cut our way through forest undergrowth for hours on end. Starting with a steep climb, we had to dodge the water which was pouring down in rivulets between the trees. The erstwhile track had been washed away and now formed the bed of a torrential river, which having scattered the loose material was in parts quite deep. The horses floundered about in great distress and uncertainty for some time, and finally we decided that there was nothing for it but to make a path for ourselves through the thicket—fortunately not of a particularly dense description. To make the whole concern narrower, one pony was unhitched, and I led him, while the men struggled to get the tarantass through the trees, branches from which had from time to time to be hacked off in order to let it pass. Frequently we had to negotiate rushing streams. One of us

would leap over first to receive the leading rein of the loose pony—anything but a docile little beast—which would then jump across. It went down once, but fortunately was none the worse, and the Jamschik was on ahead and did not see it. I also went down once, in the very middle of a stream, the banks of which had not afforded a very good take-off. Amusement in that instance seemed to deprive my fellow-traveller of all sympathy.

Our gymnastic feats, however, were not such as to swamp our appreciation of the scenery around us. It was as though one gardener had decided to make a rockery of ferns and foliage whilst the other had come along and sewn seeds of every variety of flowers among them. We feasted on the sight and scent. It was marvellously pretty here, and we lamented that the Jamschik saw fit to press on, and bring us, after some strenuous hours, to an open hill-side before he would allow us to outspan and have tiffin. Certainly it was dry enough there; hot beyond expression. The weather had undergone a sharp reaction, and we sat grilling in the sun until our thoughtful driver rigged up a sailcloth, when the effect of our hard morning's work, to say nothing of lunch, induced us to succumb promptly to a siesta in its shade.

As to why the Jamschik should loaf now when but a few hours previously he had hurried us uncomfortably, we could not fathom until in the late afternoon we arrived on the banks of the Hara

Gol, the most important river on our route, and found it to be so high that it might be another two days before we could get over in safety. Other people had been hung up in the same way, and we fraternised with a large family of Russians whose destination was the gold-mining district to the north-east of Urga. It was here that my fellow-traveller and I had our first—and almost our only—difference of opinion. I had my own notions as to suitable places for camping out, and did not at all wish to do so upon ground that from time to time was covered with water, and which after all was only temporarily dried-up swamp. I was certain that we should be much harassed by mosquitoes. We were both rather tired, and—shall I admit it?—I, at least, felt a bit irritable. In turn we had each indulged in a considerable bath in the river, but I, being in no sense a strong swimmer, had to content myself with a muddy back-water, instead of plunging into the stream. On my return I found that the superior sex had settled matters and had unpacked upon a piece of ground about 300 yards only from the little encampment belonging to our Russian neighbours, instead of, as I had wished, driving back a mere mile to a delightful hill-side where we should be free from the pest which had been my greatest trial throughout my sojourn in the East. As a matter of fact, the Jamschik had had, I suppose, the casting vote; moreover, our neighbours might have felt hurt had we gone so far away, so, with his usual

consideration for the feelings of others, my fellow-traveller had given way during my absence.

I was, again I admit it, decidedly cross, and found great relief in putting my gun together (for the first time, for it was practically a new toy), stuffing my pockets full of ammunition, and stalking off by myself to some marshy land at a considerable distance from the camp. My new toy was tremendously soothing to my feelings, and I banged away a dozen or so cartridges—incidentally killing a wild fowl which I was unable to retrieve—with great satisfaction. A small lame boy appeared from nowhere, and followed me about in delighted anticipation of empty cartridge cases. I tried to kill at too great a range. There were wild geese and duck in plenty, but they circled above my head, making derisive squawks at me; and finally with the lightest of light bags I got back to our camp happy and hungry. I managed to maintain a dignified reserve throughout dinner, at the end of which, however, rested and replete, we decided that formality and strained relations on the banks of a river a thousand miles away from civilisation were hardly consistent with our philosophy. A confidential little talk during our after-dinner stroll in the dusk put matters right again.

As a matter of fact we scored decidedly in making friends with the Russian miners. One of the party spoke a little German, and we were thus enabled to trade tinned food and chocolate for the fresh meat and bread which they had

killed and baked on the river banks. Next day we fed royally, and I maintain that the best râgout I have ever tasted was the result of my own genius in allying well-soaked, dried apricots with half a leg of mutton, and stewing the lot for hours. The apricots made an admirable substitute for the vegetables we were unable to procure. The smell arising from our delicious stew, must, we thought, be making the Jamschik's mouth water considerably, and at some sacrifice to ourselves—it was hungry work, this trekking—we decided to invite him to share the feast. What was my disgust, chagrin, when he dug his jack-knife into the saucepan and speared out the meat, deliberately pouring off all the gravy and apricots upon the ground. There was nothing to be done, but I swore there and then that this was the last time I would invite any foreigner to share pot luck of my providing.

But if the Jamschik did not appreciate the râgout, the dogs did. I had been driven by the onslaughts of the mosquitoes to sleeping rather uncomfortably in the tarantass, and all through the night I was disturbed by these horrible animals prowling about underneath, sniffing round the sleeping forms of the men under the sailcloth. They did not appear to be conscious of them, but later I discovered that the Jamschik slept with one ear at least on the "qui vive," for apparently he knew his own horses' footsteps among a hundred, and got up in the dead of night to hobble them when they

wandered together with scores of others too near to the camp.

Apart from the dogs, the persistently inquisitive Mongol boys, and the mosquitoes, camping on the banks of the Hara Gol returns to my memory as one of the pleasantest episodes in the journey. I found a perfect bathing place a little lower down the river, with a hard, shingly bottom, and though not in the current it was perfectly clear and away from the public gaze. From yourts far and near we were visited by Mongols, who usually, when they found that we did not speak their language and could convey no news to them in consequence, spent but a few minutes in making their inspection and rode off again. On one occasion we witnessed a very amusing sight. We had given a particularly ragged lama some odds and ends of food, and a squabble immediately arose between him and another. They quickly came to blows, when the smaller man, finding himself outmatched, stopped suddenly, and picking up a large boulder proceeded to hammer the head of his adversary. The Russian sense of fairplay could not stand this, and a huge man with the ruddy countenance of a David and the flaming beard combined with the muscularity of a Samson, walked in, and seizing each man by the scruff of his neck, hurled the twain apart, to the great glee of the onlookers.

At a very early hour of our third day's camp, I was awakened with the news that the river had gone down sufficiently to admit of a trial trip to

cross it. A great deal of preparation was necessary in order to keep things dry, and when we were about the middle of the river it was just "touch and go" lest the water would overflow the sides of the tarantass. A great caravan of us crossed together, Russians, Chinese, and a rabble of Mongols, who, stripped almost naked, carried over our loads on their saddle bows. I regretted afterwards that I took no photograph of the crossing, but I was far too much occupied in keeping my camera and cartridges dry to think of doing so.

The next two stages offered no special attraction in the matter of scenery, and we broke into the routine of the day only by leaving our tarantass for the space of an hour that we might inspect at closer quarters what looked uncommonly like a foreign building about half a mile away from the road. It turned out to be quite a large flour mill called Wang Ch'ang Shan, belonging to a Chinese firm, and employing apparently some twenty-five to thirty men. Although they offered us tea and sold us some eggs and stodgy little dough rolls at high prices, they maintained that baffling reserve as to their business, which amounts only to the polite Chinese method of telling you to mind yours. Another couple of hours brought us to an unexpected little oasis in the shape of a promising and well-built house in Russian style, but owned fortunately by a young Chinaman, who welcomed us most warmly and who could not do enough for

us. We sat on chairs and ate a delicious tiffin of lightly boiled eggs, toasted dough rolls, and *samovar* tea, at a table in great comfort, after which Mr. Gull thought to crown all by indulging in a luxurious siesta in—what looked like—a nice clean little bedroom adjoining. I sat and read a book over a final cup of tea. I had not settled down for more than ten minutes when the peace was suddenly disturbed by execrations coming from the other room, and an earnest entreaty that I should send in the Chinese proprietor at once "to see". He did so, and found the usually philosophical Englishman rampant and furious. Biting him, crawling over his clothes and on the cork mattress which he had taken in with him, were numbers of large and lively—I must write it—bugs. Nothing but a complete bath in a very small basin, followed by a change of all his clothes—which involved the entire unpacking of the tarantass—would soothe him. The incident had really a humorous side, for we had, in theory, contemplated encounter with every variety of carnivorous insect on our journey; and then at first sight to produce such a hullabaloo!

Our Chinese host was careful to explain that the majority of his guests who made use of his rooms were less cleanly than ourselves, and that the Russians who were his most frequent visitors were "dirty pigs". He was himself suffering from a highly inflamed condition of both eyes, and was mightily pleased when I gave him some

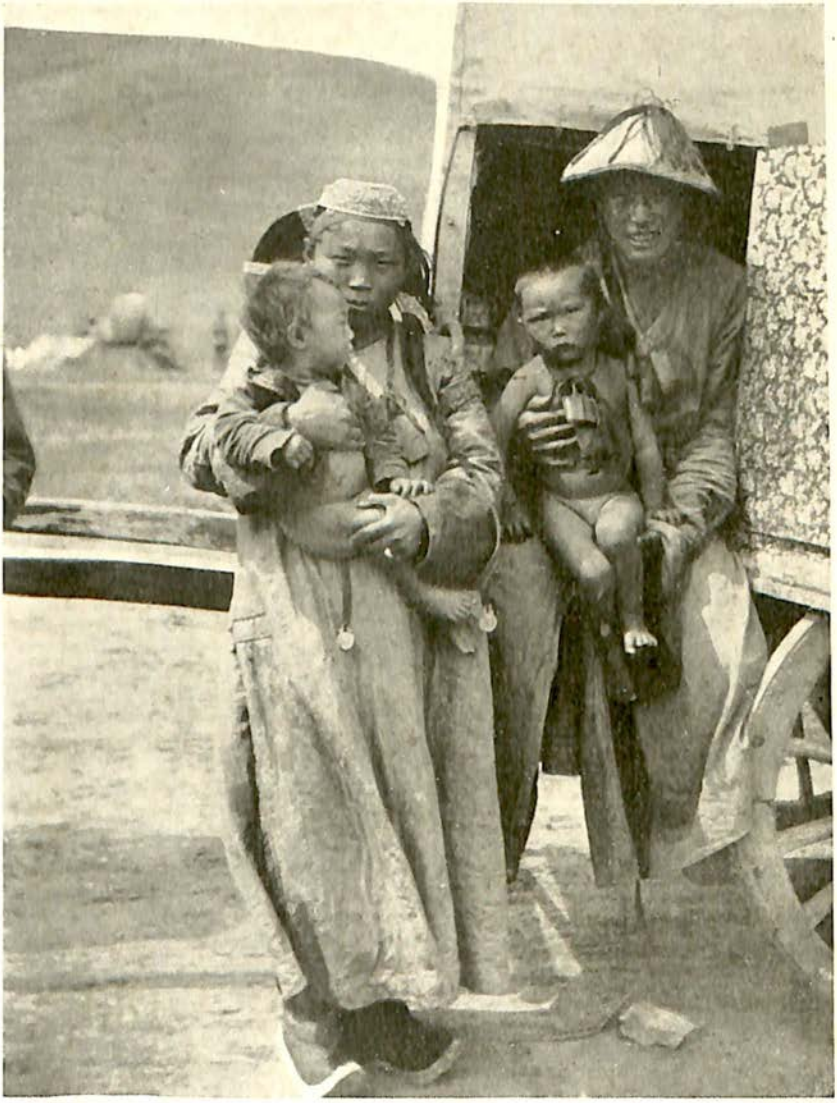
"foreign medicine" with the use of which I predicted a speedy cure, as well as showing him how to open his eye in a wine-glass. I bore the mild contempt of my fellow-traveller with the patience bred of faith, and nobly refrained, when some weeks later we returned from Urga and found that the solution of boracic acid had done its work in effecting a complete cure, from saying, "I told you so".

The night following we were far away from all humanity and passed the night sheer out on the open hill-side down by the wheels of the tarantass. We had had a long and somewhat dreary drive, twelve hours in all, exclusive of a midday rest. To go to sleep with a vision of heaven beyond the twinkling stars is one thing—to wake up in the cheerless grey dawn, saturated with dew and stiff with cold, is another. We had little difficulty in starting off at four o'clock that morning, and I do not remember that there was a great deal of conversation between the three of us for the first couple of hours or so.

CHAPTER XI

"Better good neighbours than relations far away"
—*Chinese proverb*

OUR proximity to Urga became now apparent in the increasing traffic over the prairie. From the hill-side on which we halted at breakfast time we watched the life of the plains—little groups of horsemen sitting casually in their saddles, turning round to stare at us, standing in their stirrups, sped quickly past. A settlement was in process of striking camp; the trellis and felt of the yourts were folded up and piled on the backs of the unwilling camels. A splendid Mongol riding proudly at the head of a string of camel carts came along from the west, dismounted, stretched himself, and climbed up to see what we were doing. By unmistakable signs he invited us to descend to his caravan below. In the first cart were his wife and two little sons, the jolliest little creatures imaginable. In pukka Oriental style I admired and fingered the headdress of the lady, and then dandled the children, expressing my appreciation of their weight and beauty. The man quite grasped the photographic idea, and posed his family for my



A MONGOL AND HIS FAMILY ON THE PLAINS NEAR URGA, POSED FOR THE AUTHOR'S BENEFIT

benefit. Afterwards he surprised us greatly by asking for money; despite the fact that one string of his wife's pearls would have fetched far more than we were able to raise between us. But he did not resent our refusal, and hailed us with the cheery greeting of "San bainu" when we overtook him later in the day.

Moving on from the plains which stretched away into the mountains and valleys on all sides, we soon began the steep ascent of the Urga Pass when the subtlety of our Jamschik showed itself in suggesting that in the bordering woods hereabouts there was any amount of game. We jumped out of the tarantass—which was soon out of sight—in a sanguine frame of mind, and guns over our shoulders we trudged and trudged up that mountain side. Tiring it was, in the fierce July sun, beyond expression, and we got—never a shot. But the scenery here was well worth the fag of the climb. Range upon range of mountains disclosed themselves as we ascended among a perfect wilderness of flowers. Peonies, roses, and delphiniums, Japanese anemones, blue columbines, red and yellow lilies—a background of dark pine forest, and away in the distance, blue mountains beneath a canopy of soft masses of rolling clouds.

Half-way up, we were overtaken by a number of Russian officers who looked, as well they might, in astonishment at the sight of a couple of English people, apparently without belongings or

conveyance, calmly strolling up a mountain in the heart of Mongolia. We met them again at the summit of the Altai Berg. Their Mongols were having a rest, and incidentally, I dare say, "gaining merit" by adding a few stones to the great cairn, from which numbers of dirty rags serving as prayer flags fluttered. I think the officers were waiting in order to discover what on earth we were doing there and what was our object in going to Urga. They did not, however, make much headway with us. Their knowledge of German was very limited and we on our side did not see the force of burdening them at this juncture with our confidences. They, needless to say, had remained in their conveyances all the way up. The latter were being drawn 'Orton fashion by four mounted Mongols. A pole is fixed across the thin ends of the shafts, and is carried by the Mongols between the pummel of their saddles and their stomachs. Usually a couple of men ride on either side of the shafts. Six to eight Mongols accompany each carriage, women as well as men taking turn and turn about. They laugh and fool about all the time, tearing up hill and down dale, the tarantass swaying about with plenty of play at the other end of the shafts. They are absolutely reckless and care not one straw what happens—as we learned to our cost later on.

Our Jamschik greeted us cheerily when we met him again at the top of the pass, and at once

THE AUTHOR'S PARTY INSPECTING A CARAVAN

THE SUMMIT OF THE ALTAI BERG

"took on" the Mongol outriders for a race down into Urga. We did not know the Russian for "not so quick" or "steady," and we flew over the ground holding on like grim death, our three horses galloping and taking the most reckless short cuts at breakneck speed. Down, down we tore, over the roughest and most impossible tracks to an accompaniment of terrific jolts and bangs. The Mongols kept up, yelling and laughing as they rolled about in their saddles. It was no less terrifying than it was painful, but personally I was far too tired to care much what happened, or to feel as alarmed as I do even now in retrospect. But we got in ahead of the Russians, which was a great crow over for us.

Urga was at length in view. Situated on the north bank of the Tola River, it lies 600 miles north of the Chinese frontier at Kalgan, and 200 miles south of the Russian frontier at Kiachta. A long straggling vista of gaudy temples and groups of yourts, little wooden houses enclosed by high palisades, numbers of brightly painted sheds which we found afterwards to contain the Tibetan prayer wheels, a few foreign bungalows looking like dolls' houses and built of pitch-pine, as well as clusters of Chinese houses—such was our first impression of Mongolia's capital. On the western side lies the Holy City, where, it is estimated, dwell some thirty thousand lamas, and in which no lay man or woman may remain after sundown. The Chinese city, Mai-mai'ch'eng

again, is situated to the east, and between the twain are a number of untidy, depressing little shanties, as well as the pleasant Russian consulate, out of all harmony and character with the rest, belonging to the ever-increasing army of Russian traders. Closed in on all sides by mountains, some of considerable altitude and densely wooded, the sacred mountain of Bogdo N'or dominates the city. Bogdo N'or abounds in game, but nothing must here be killed, and no one may pitch a tent on that side of the Tola River which separates the holy ground from the plains upon which Urga is situated. Death is the punishment for the Mongol who so far forgets his traditions as to kill bird, beast, or fish on Bogdo N'or, and imprisonment for life—the far worse fate—for any foreigner who should be rash enough thus to transgress.

One trusts to luck very largely in travelling under such circumstances, and we had no very definite idea as to what we were going to do when we reached Urga. At the time of our visit, exclusive of Russians there were only two Europeans in Urga, probably in Mongolia, and Mr. Gull and I were the sole representatives of Great Britain and Ireland. The two Europeans were a Norwegian and a German, both engaged in trading with the Mongols. The latter I had already met in Kalgan, and he was certainly as good as his word and twice as hospitable when I saw him again in Urga. To the former Mr. Gull had an introduction, and on arrival we made straight for

his compound where he received us most kindly, allowing us to make our headquarters with him during our stay in Urga, as well as letting us go shares in his commissariat for the time being. The Russian Agent, to whom we reported ourselves next day, treated us with the greatest hospitality and contributed greatly to our comfort by lending me some chairs and other luxuries for the tiny Chinese house provided for me in the Norwegian's compound. Our luck held good.

Anxious to see the Mongols as they really are and through the unprejudiced eyes of those unconnected with political considerations, we were fortunate indeed in having for our host a man of such intellectual qualities and broad sympathies as Mr. Mamen. Speaking their language as one of themselves—he had, I believe, lived in Mongolia for under two years—this young Norwegian of the appearance and stature of a Viking, was on friendly terms with most of the Mongol princes and officials, evidently being well-liked and trusted by them.

One has but to forego for a short time what are regarded as the commonplaces of existence in order to appreciate them at their true value, and, after a week of far from restful nights, I could have dilated at length upon the sheer luxury of a very tenth-rate bed. It was a day or two after I reached Urga that I felt my old appetite for sightseeing return, and this was whetted by a curious little ceremony of daily recurrence, a good view of

which was obtainable without going beyond the limits of the compound. Less than two hundred yards away there appeared above the compound wall a small stage about four or five feet square supported by a rough scaffolding of perhaps twenty-five feet high. Each day when the sun was well up, two lamas, climbing laboriously up to their perch, would don their official yellow Chanticleer pull-on caps, queer ragged capes of many colours, and proceed to call their gods to the Temple. Turning to the east, north, west, and always ending up with the south, thus facing the sacred mountain, they would, first one and then the other, produce prolonged and continuous blasts by blowing upon a conch shell, the melancholy and hollow note of which seems to come back to me over time and space.

Living as we were in the Chinese quarter of the place, and an intolerably gritty road of almost two miles in extent separating us from West Urga, obviously the first thing to be done was to obtain ponies. I was all for purchasing a couple outright, but other counsels prevailed and we hired them, thus placing ourselves at the mercy of a scallywag horse-dealer, a lesser mandarin by the way, who imposed upon us from beginning to end. The price, small though it sounds at home, was high at thirty roubles (then £3) a month for each nag (in a place where one can purchase a very nice little beast for less than double that amount), even though it included such feed as could be

picked up on the plains during the night, and when we were not using them. I really think their owner must have had his tongue in his cheek when he sent along the first pair for us to try. Mine had the appearance of a worn-out van-horse—a tall, thin brute, with a mouth of iron and legs that scattered in all directions when I forced him into a canter—which was not very often. I kept him for one day only. For Mr. Gull a miniature pony was provided. It had a sore mouth which made it extremely irritable. Together we certainly presented a very comical appearance. But any mount in dusty Urga is preferable to none, and on sight-seeing bent it really did not matter much that our nags were "crocks"; the fact that with patient, drooping heads they would stand for any length of time, was perhaps, under the circumstances, rather convenient than otherwise.

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CHAPTER XII

"He that does not believe in others finds that they do not believe in him"

—*Chinese proverb*

OUR very first ride took us right into—what any Mongol other than a lama would, I am sure, describe as—the heart of Urga. At the foot of the hill upon which the holy city, K'urun, stands is the centre of activity in Mongolia's capital—the horse and camel market. All day and every day the bartering goes on, and it is here perhaps that you may study with the greatest advantage the salient characteristics of the race. The Chinese, I believe, invariably score off the Mongols in business transactions, but not so in connection with horses. The Mongol is born, bred, gets drunk, and dies in the saddle, and, like many others with a knowledge of horse flesh, he would cheat his own grandmother over a deal of this nature—except for the fact that the old lady would probably be one too many for him.

In a dusty expanse, fringed on either side with small Chinese shops crowned with low curved roofs, painted poles, and swinging signs with gold characters carved large on them, stand the ponies

in their hundreds, and the supply would seem to be well-nigh inexhaustible. Generally speaking, the animals are small and unattractive looking, and it would certainly require the "seeing eye" to make a selection from this mass of unkempt little beasts who, until they are mounted, show not the least suggestion of the spirit that is in them. The camels are few and far between, and I have never seen anything approaching a fine beast on sale here. One has to penetrate into the compounds of the camel owners in order to buy the best, I think, for usually it is but the indifferent and unwanted that find their way into the open market.

Urga, the Da Huraz (the first monastery) or Bogda Lama en Hurae (the encampment of the supreme lama) as it is severally described by the Mongols themselves (Urga being probably a Russian corruption), Urga, the religious centre as well as the capital of Mongolia, may be split up into three distinct and separate divisions, the market-place serving as a link between two of them, the holy city and the Russian quarter. The former, in shape resembling a gigantic dust mound and in appearance a piece of crazy patch-work, is covered with a perfect rabbit warren of compounds, in most of which felt yourts take the place of buildings. By circuitous paths between the high palisades which cut one compound off from another, one reaches as one nears the top the so-called University buildings, "the Gando,"

from which at certain hours of the day lamas in their thousands may be seen pouring forth.

Crowning the hill is the great white temple, newly erected and barely finished when I saw it. In walking round a temple, either in or outside, foreigners should remember that sacred objects should always be kept on the right hand as a mark of respect. Inside the temple is one of the largest Buddhas in the world; an immense brazen figure with four arms rising nearly one hundred feet out of the centre of the symbolic lotus flower. This was presented by Bogdo, the ruler, spiritual and temporal, of Mongolia—a thank-offering for restored eyesight (which I heard is now as bad as ever) at a cost of 1,500,000 roubles. Facing the idol, and in direct violation of all Buddhistic principles which ordain the celibacy of its priesthood, two thrones, equal in every respect and draped in royal canary-coloured silk damask, are placed for the lama pontiff and—his consort. This really beautiful temple, with its mass of gilding and harmonious decoration, forms a perpetual testimony to the inability of the Mongols to go far independently of Chinese assistance, for one does not contemplate as a likely event in the near future the building and decoration by Russian workmen of what they would regard as pagan edifices. This Mongolian building, with all its Tibetan ornamentation and detail, was erected entirely by Chinese hands, the brass for the Buddha being brought across

THE GREAT WHITE TEMPLE, URGA

THE HORSE AND CAMEL MARKET, URGA

the desert from Dolo N'or. In no sense do politics come within the sphere of my observations, but having seen a certain amount of Chinese, Russians, and Mongols in juxtaposition, there appears to me to be but little doubt as to which two nations form natural allies. The Mongols, beyond breeding ponies and cattle, making the felt of their yourts and engaging in a certain amount of transport business, do practically nothing, make practically nothing, for themselves. Their very clothes and ornaments are of Chinese manufacture, and certainly it is the Chinese who are alone responsible for anything that is beautiful in Urga.

I, as other travellers in Mongolia have done, found it very difficult to buy any characteristically and exclusively Mongolian objects, and was therefore delighted to discover, not many days before my departure, that a Mongol auction was in progress immediately outside the great temple. I went boldly in amongst the crowd and made bids for various things belonging, so far as I could make out, to departed lamas. The articles on sale were in the main clothes, altogether too dirty to handle, but with a few interesting little objects connected with the temple services among the rubbish, of which two, a priest's bell and a small brass drumstick, passed into my possession. A fine milk-jug in white metal with thick raised repoussé bands became mine at the price of five roubles. Instead of an aperture, the top

was covered in and holes pierced through the metal to allow the milk to be poured into the jug. Thus, there was not the faintest chance of its ever being properly washed out, which, seeing the use to which it was to be put, seemed a drawback.

A very decorative pail, of copper and brass, much worn, and certainly without great expectation of life before it from an utilitarian point of view, greatly excited my envy, and I made a bid for it—two roubles. A Mongol promptly offered a few kopecks more, and my price finally rose to three roubles or six shillings. No one outbidding me, so far as I could see, I was fully under the impression that the pail was now my property; but not so. In company with the auctioneer and three or four others, I went the round of the neighbouring yourts to find out whether or no anyone else wanted it and would give more. The man, however, whom the auctioneer thought might care to make a higher bid was not at home, and after hanging about for fully a couple of hours I came away without my pail, and learned once more that hurry is a word unknown in the East. There is apparently no time limit for bids at a Mongol auction, and a transaction frequently takes several days to complete.

The Russian quarter is adjacent to the holy city and separated therefrom, as I have said, by the horse market and the Chinese shops. It boasts of some half a dozen general stores, at

which tinned foods, boots, and materials for clothes can be purchased at ridiculously inflated prices; there is also a restaurant of a most depressing description, as well as a chemist's shop. It may well be imagined that, the majority of the Chinese traders having been driven forth during the rebellion in 1912 on the one hand, and the virtual suppression of Chinese goods by a grinding taxation on the other, Russian retail trade in Urga is in a flourishing condition.

The Mongols are now to all intents and purposes forced very largely into dealing with Russian stores, and when one is told that 40 to 50 per cent is regarded as a reasonable profit, one can only wonder how long it will be before the natives realise that they have exchanged the frying pan for a remarkably fierce fire. But it is to be trusted that this condition of affairs will right itself again in time. Russian enterprise —should it develop—will probably fail through lack of labour. Their own command of labour in these regions is practically *nil*, and the cost of imported energy would be likely to spell failure to anyone engaging in business. On the other hand, the Mongols never have worked and it is highly improbable that they ever will. Mongol requirements are simple, but such as they are it is clear that they need the Chinese to supply them.

This Russian quarter forms the least attractive division of Urga. The houses are small, squalid,

and untidy; their inhabitants possess apparently not the faintest knowledge of sanitation. What must be the civilising effect, of which one hears, of the Russian influence upon the Mongols, it is not difficult to foretell. The Chinese may be dirty, are extremely dirty in some respects, no doubt, but at least they do not appear to lose their sense of the artistic for all their defects in this direction, and under normal conditions even in the poorest quarters of their cities, a certain "esprit," a "joie de vivre," is seldom absent. It is exceedingly difficult to arrive at anything representing even an approximate estimate of the number of Russians in Urga. Of civilians, perhaps 1000 forms a liberal estimate, but all enquiries as regards the military strength are politely but firmly repulsed. The people in the Russian quarter, in the shops, restaurant, and on the streets, are a surly looking lot. Their suspicious character is plainly painted upon their uncouth faces, and every one with whose business in life they are not entirely "au fait," they regard as a spy of some sort. Throughout our stay in Urga it was significant that we rode nowhere but that we met the same Buriat soldier ostentatiously uninterested in our existence.

Urga must have presented a gayer appearance under Chinese rule, when the great untidy stretch of waste land reaching almost from West Urga into Mai-mai'ch'eng, waste land formerly bordered

with Chinese shops and houses, would have had a far more cheery atmosphere than it possesses nowadays. Now the few Mongol yamens stand isolated and unsupported, and the merry "va-et-vient" of commercial prosperity is no more. At night it is said to be rash to venture across it unaccompanied, and indeed on more than one occasion we encountered a Cossack riding full pelt across the stony expanse, brandishing his naked revolver in his right hand. But latterly there appears to have been a somewhat arbitrary planning out and dividing up of the main part of Urga by the Russians, and an expanse which must be of dimensions approaching something like two miles long by three-quarters of a mile wide in the very heart of Urga, and in the centre of which the Russian consulate happens to stand, is to be doled out in concessions to Russians and to Russians only. To the north of this desolate scene are sundry temples, and outside them stand a number of brightly painted little sheds containing the well-known Tibetan prayer wheels. Sexagonal in form, and with the characters representing "Om Mani Padme Hum" painted in red letters upon the panels, these prayer cylinders turn on a central pin, and anyone giving a hefty swing to them as he passes says his prayers with a minimum of trouble for a maximum of result. The Mongols, both lamas and laity, use the wheels devoutly, and one's ears grow accustomed to the light creaking sound long before one realises whence it comes.

The Russian consulate, in the midst of a heterogeneous collection of barracks, officers' quarters, and outbuildings, is a pleasant house enough, English in style and furnished, the Russian diplomatic agent told me, to resemble an English country house inside as far as possible. Of modest dimensions, it stands back from the road in an untidy compound, over the gates of which the Imperial standard looms large and menacing. The present agent is a man of marked ability, and speaks, I believe, no less than eight modern languages with a fluency equal to his native tongue. He has obviously succeeded in bringing the Mongol authorities to heel in a surprising degree as was evidenced not long ago when he insisted that the Hut'ukt'u, the ruler of all the Mongols, supported by some of the chief men of his country, should toe the line in person and make profound apology at the consulate for some slight that had been shown to the Russian flag. Whether or no this was a well-calculated action has yet to be proved. But that the Mongols are making a desperate effort not to be swallowed up exclusively and irrevocably by Russia is strongly suggested by their recently expressed desire to the other powers that the latter should be represented by consuls in Urga "in order to conclude treaties of commerce and friendship". It is moreover rumoured that the Mongolian Government has recently issued an order forbidding the Chinese to sell any land in Mongolia to Russians. The

A BEAUTIFUL TEMPLE AT MAI-MAI'CH'ENG

A MONGOL PRINCESS IN HER OFFICIAL ROBES, ACCOMPANIED BY HER TWO LADIES

only other house of any size or importance is the hideous red-brick erection which forms the headquarters of the Mongolore Company, which represents an important concession of gold-mining rights granted to the Russians prior to the declaration of independence.

In so far as the structural picturesque is concerned, this is undoubtedly now centred in and confined to the Chinese quarter, Mai-mai'ch'eng, where fine gateways and a very beautiful little temple remain as evidence of the prosperity enjoyed under Chinese rule. Now the entire place, which is surrounded by a strong stockade of fourteen or fifteen feet high, which, in a country where stone is so rare and labour so expensive, takes the place of the usual encompassing wall, is almost entirely deserted, and one may walk from end to end without encountering half a dozen people. The courtyard and temple far surpass in decoration and cleanliness anything that I saw in China. The mural paintings illustrate Chinese fables and are exceptionally well carried out and preserved. They have evidently been most carefully cherished by the guild of Shansi merchants, the Shih Erh Chia, of whom it is the headquarters. The Mongols use the temple as much as the Chinese do, and I watched a Mongol princess in her official robes, accompanied by her two ladies, most devoutly performing her prostrations one day. She allowed me afterwards to take two or three photographs of her, but it was difficult to

persuade her into sufficient light to make a very satisfactory picture.

Immediately outside the north gate of Mai-mai' ch'eng is the Chinese cemetery, where hundreds of unburied coffins are piled awaiting, I gathered, the far distant day when they might be carried back to be interred in Chinese soil. The poorer Chinese, for whom there was never such happy prospect, are buried in alien earth behind the Russian consulate—a series of little mounds like magnified molehills being all that remains to indicate the fact.

CHAPTER XIII

"Since men live not for a hundred years it is vain to scheme for a thousand"

—*Chinese proverb*

WHEREAS in Inner Mongolia I did not see the Chakhars in sufficient numbers to enable me to form even an impression upon which to base a generalisation as to typical characteristics, the Khalkha or Northern Mongol struck me as being of rather superior build. Roughly speaking, I think that the average height of a Khalkha man must be in the neighbourhood of five feet eight inches, while a large number of them are really tall. The women are strikingly smaller, and, generally considered, are not less than ten or twelve inches shorter than the men. The recollection I have carried away of them is that they are a fairly handsome race. Masses of black hair surmount almond-shaped, strikingly bright and responsive eyes; the cheek-bones are high and slightly flattened. Small, well-formed aquiline noses above shapely mouths and firm chins lend a suggestion of strong character. The teeth are, as a rule, beautiful, and a ruddy colouring showing

through the sun-scorched, wind-weathered skin, gives them a very healthy appearance."

The principal difference in dress between the northern and southern Mongol lies in the arrangement of the hair of the married women. In Inner Mongolia the form of headdress might be described as a skull cap of silver filagree, from which long chains studded with precious stones are suspended. The hair is fastened up and hardly shows at all.

The Khalkha matron, however, is contented with nothing so simple. Her sleek locks are strained over a wire frame which spreads out like wings above her ears, and are held together by some resinous preparation, with jewelled slides at intervals to keep the whole in place. Surmounting this is the filagree skull cap, often richly set with turquoises and pearls, and from it hang tassels of pearls ten or twelve inches in length. In poorer circumstances the jewelled slides have their counterparts in little strips of bamboo, and the pearls would be substituted by chains of silver and strings of coral. One and all adopt this obviously inconvenient style of coiffure, the unmarried girl alone wearing her hair in long plaits and entirely unadorned. The Khalkha women must have exceedingly long tresses, for although nine or ten inches are thus taken up by the wings, the remainder is of sufficient length to form into long plaits which, as shown in the picture of the princess, are either confined in highly decorative

silver tubes, or are allowed to fall free on each side of the figure to the waist.

Hat pins being an unknown weapon in Mongolia, it was a matter of much conjecture to me as to how these ladies contrived to keep their smart little hats so securely perched on the summit of this elaborate headdress. The hats themselves are very trim and dainty. Made of course by the Chinese, who are always great hands with the paste pot, a shape is first created from bamboo paper, hard and unpliable, not unlike a jelly mould. Over this is stretched yellow satin, while the brim is turned up with black velvet in summer, or with a handsome piece of fur in winter. The crown of the hat tapers to a point embellished by a gold or silver ornament, which in the case of men supports the ball of coloured crystal denoting by its colour the rank of the wearer. Men's hats are otherwise similar to women's, and if the wearer belongs to the mandarin class a peacock's feather protrudes horizontally from below the crystal ball. The main difference, headdress apart, between men's and women's clothes is that the former sport a sash bound round and round their waists with the ends tucked in. All wear long coats and trousers, the women having their shoulders padded up into little peaks such as were worn in Elizabethan days. All have very long sleeves, the cuffs of which are turned up with pale blue—no matter what the colour of the coat—and cover the finger-tips.

The material from which the clothes of the more wealthy are made is such as we use for our Court trains. In really beautiful satin brocades and thick soft silks both men and women are attired in this remote corner of the globe, and I can well believe that dress forms a heavy item in Mongol expenditure. Extremely fond of colour, the Mongol taste, or rather that of the Chinese Worth or Paquin who dictates to them, runs to rich harmony rather than to garishness, while their constancy to the prevailing fashion, which here is the very reverse of fleeting since it probably has not modified in any way for the past hundred years—maybe much more—renders the finish and workmanship quite excellent. While possessing small and well-shaped hands and feet, the Mongols thrust these latter into clumsy boots which we should consider many sizes too large for them. They are made of inferior looking leather and the toes turn skywards; their loose tops, coming half-way to the knee, are usually ornamented with very pretty green and white sticking.

Of their character one must speak of course almost entirely by hearsay. Their very name is suggestive, "Mong" meaning "brave," while volumes might be filled with legends concerning their prowess. It would indeed be absurd to generalise at all upon those with whom one came into personal contact in the space of a few weeks, and in the complete absence of knowledge of the language. That they have a keen sense of humour

is apparent to the most casual observer, and anything in the way of a practical joke played off on the foreigner or equally upon one of their number will produce hilarious merriment. In common with most people who preserve a simple life and do not allow their desires to advance beyond the possibility of fulfilment, the Mongols are, in the absence of a cause which provokes them to anger, very good-tempered, and most distinctly are they philosophical. An angry Mongol is, however, an ugly sight, and one, if possible, to be avoided. Of his capacity for endurance there can be no doubt. It is constantly exemplified in everyday life. I have indeed heard it stated that a Mongol will ride 600 miles in nine days, using the same horse throughout. An instance of their toughness was shown by the cheery old mafu who looked after our host's ponies and occasionally rode with us while we were in Urga. A somewhat heavy fall from his horse one day resulted in a trio of broken ribs, and the man, whose age must have been in the neighbourhood of sixty, remained huddled up in his yourt for twenty-four hours. For bed, however, in our sense of the term, the Mongol has but little use, and if he cannot live his ordinary life he usually dies in preference. The mafu turned up the day following his accident, and upon enquiry as to the damage to his ribs, admitted that "It hurts a little when I cough". On another occasion, in the depth of winter, one of the ponies in his charge strayed, and for thirty hours was

missing. Taking another horse, the old mafu went out into the neighbouring mountains to find him, and as the hours went on his employer grew anxious. Night fell, and the thermometer descended two or three degrees below zero. It was evening on the following day when he re-appeared, none the worse for his exposure, nor from the fact that he had not broken his fast throughout the day and a half he had been absent.

That the Mongols are wantonly cruel, I have never heard any evidence. Certain cruelty arises from a dogma in their faith rather than from any direct idea of being maliciously hurtful. They will, for instance, leave an animal to die in anguish rather than put it out of its misery, for nominally they are not allowed to take life, and consequently do not trouble themselves to perform an act of humanity for its own sake. That they will be brutally cruel when it is a question of revenge there can be no doubt. On the other hand, that they are capable of real devotion to their animals is, I think, suggested by the following incidents, written down as told to me one evening by the Norseman, when we were sitting on a river bank waiting for wild duck to come up.

"The man will never get over it," he said. "He was overwhelmed by his grief. He loved those two fine dogs of his and he kept them only for his hunting. He took them with him to the mountains to hunt lynx in the dense forest which cover them over there. Three or four days at a

time, he would go out and his bag was never less than two or three, sometimes four or five, skins, worth from twenty to thirty roubles apiece. Then for two days he would sit in his yourt, resting, and cleaning his guns, feeding heavily, and perhaps drinking the vodka the Russians had given him when he sold his skins. Pig should be his next object, he decided, and with one companion and his two dogs he sallied forth to the mountain side. From a thicket, out rushed four great boars. Off flew the lynx hounds after them. Bang, bang, went the guns, and the quarry was slain. But alas! the trusty hound who had leapt up to it was slain too—shot through the heart. The hunter returned to his yourt on the plains near Urga, leaving the slaughtered pig behind him on the mountain side, but bearing with him only the corpse of his dog. Never before has a Mongol been seen to weep like this man. For three days he sorrowed terribly. He would take no food. He desired speech with no man. In life there was no comfort for him because of the thought that with his own hands he had shot his dog. And now he goes hunting, taking with him his one lynx hound only, and does not do so badly. The better of the two dogs is the survivor, but the hunter will never admit this fact.

"It was this man's own cousin I often went out with," continued my companion, "and he was every bit as keen on dogs. Once when I was with him up beyond that ridge to the west there, a

powerful bull elk broke cover, and in the twinkling of an eye the dogs were upon him. A careful aim was taken by the Mongol and—his gun dropped. With a tremendous kick the elk had freed himself from his pursuers, and uttering a cry of acute agony the dog fell and lay helpless on the turf. The elk's hoof had caught her full in the muzzle, and the space of time during which she would have the power to breathe through the pouring blood could be but short. His master ran up, calling to the other man to hurry. 'Do what you can for her, do all you can to save her life.' He knew it was hopeless, and he left to his friend's care his dying dog. Revenge surged up in his heart. He thought of nothing but that cruel kick from the elk's hoof, and nothing did he consider as to where he was going, nor as regards provision for the hunt. For two days he pursued his prey, foodless, drinkless—and he returned empty handed to the camp. 'I have killed that elk,' was all that he vouchsafed when he came back, and he straightway went out to look at the frozen body of his dog with its mangled muzzle."

The Mongols are astonishingly fine shots, and it would take a very accomplished sportsman to compete with them in potting the pretty little sable-like tarbagans, whose heads flash in and out of their holes on the prairie hereabouts with lightning-like rapidity. While some of the well-to-do Mongols possess fine weapons (rifles of the

most modern design, which I was told were imported from Germany on very easy terms), the majority of the hunting fraternity content themselves with old muzzle loaders. Practically all Mongols rest their guns on some support when aiming, and the muzzle loaders frequently have a forked attachment which can be let down and fixed in an instant.

The Mongols possess that most enviable capacity for putting away an immense amount of food at a sitting, following which they can, if necessary, fast for a very considerable time. The staple food of the Khalkha Mongol appears to be meat in direct relation to the length of his purse; horse, camel, mule, antelope, mutton, nothing seems to come amiss; he takes, too, preparations of milk, farinaceous food, such as koumiss and millet, as well as brick-tea made with milk. Added to these, the well-to-do in Urga doubtless buy such delicacies as the Russian shops provide when it takes their fancy. In a general store we met one day a charming old mandarin of obvious refinement and high breeding. He was in company with several ladies for whom he was buying sweets in the most approved Western style. There were six of them altogether, four ladies and two men. All were gorgeously dressed, the ladies with most wonderful ornaments and string upon string of pearls. The men had fine single stones, one a pearl, and the other a large aqua marine, set in front of their caps. They tasted two or three kinds of sweets,

and finally, going in for quantity rather than quality, the doyen of the party purchased a 7-lb. tin of rather unattractive looking pear-drops, which was wrapped in paper and tied up for him. A moment afterwards the string broke and the tin fell to the ground, burst open, and part of the contents scattered on the questionable boards. They took it most good humouredly, laughing inordinately, and all of them went down on their knees on the floor to retrieve the sweets. To us they were exceedingly friendly, and the older mandarin chatted away to us in indifferent Chinese irrespective as to whether we understood or not.

Drunkenness, said to be on the increase, is, relatively speaking, far more common among the Mongols than among the Chinese, and in Urga it is no unusual thing to see two or three men going about with the cangue, a wooden collar nearly two feet square, padlocked round their necks as a punishment for the recent lapse from the paths of sobriety. A frequent repetition of the offence results in the culprit being marched off to the yamen and being severely beaten. The most usual method of becoming intoxicated is by drinking arac, a spirit which is produced by fermenting mares' milk. I understand that one has to drink this in large quantities to attain to the condition, but bulk, if in the end the object is achieved, seems to offer no drawback to the inebriate, for I have known Breton peasants who would put away as many as ten litres and become gloriously

drunk before half their day's work was done. A certain amount of Chinese whisky derived from grain is imported, but it is very much more expensive, of course, and, generally speaking, even with its more tardy result, distilled mares' milk is preferred by the Mongols. The lamas, whose vows in addition to those of celibacy include abstinence from strong drink and the flesh of animals, are also to be found amongst the bibulous.

The more degenerate Chakhar is said to be addicted in a very slight degree only to the use of opium, but so far as I was able to ascertain the vice in Outer Mongolia is practically unknown. In view of this fact it was interesting to read in "The Times" immediately on my return from Mongolia that an English syndicate at Harbin had been reported to have made a proposal to the Mongol Government to pay them £100,000 annually for the privilege of importing opium into their country. Upon the Russian Agent at Urga protesting, the Mongol Government replied to the effect that the danger arising from opium in Mongolia was in no sense commensurate with the advantages to be derived from the annual receipt of a million roubles; also, that the opium would not be for the consumption of the Mongols. Under the present conditions of their relations with China and the flight of the vast majority of Chinese from Mongolian territory, this latter contention carries its own confutation. The Chinese

in Mongolia are certainly in nothing approaching sufficient numbers at the time being to justify any syndicate in paying £100,000 per annum for the privilege of providing them with the pernicious drug. Besides, away from the influence of Russians, whom he now undoubtedly resents as having got the better of him, the Mongol when you meet him on his own ground is a cheery, friendly person enough, and under the most trying and arduous conditions of travel it is the Mongol who keeps his temper best and who remains complacent when every one else is inclined to grumbling and irritability. His utter laziness and hopeless lack of gumption make him useless in an emergency, and where, I always felt, the Chinese are our superiors in their wonderful resourcefulness and quick adaptability, the Mongol is stupid and shiftless in the extreme.

Tremendously under the influence of their priests, the result of their religion or, perhaps it would be better to put it, the application of their religion, is not such as to compel one's admiration. Humanity, for instance, is by no means one of their salient characteristics, and their behaviour to old people, whom they will turn out of their yourts to die on the dust heaps, is absolutely barbarous.

The loose matrimonial relations prevailing amongst the Mongols are much condemned amongst the Chinese, who, although they take temporary wives during their sojourn in Mongolia,

where Chinese law will not allow their own women-kind to accompany them, they never attach themselves to Mongol women in any legal sense. The Mongol women, on the other hand, are said to prefer the Chinese to their own race as husbands on the grounds that the former possess kinder and gentler dispositions. The children resulting from these mixed alliances, of which there are a great many in Urga, are called "orles" or half-breeds, by the Mongols. They are easily distinguishable from the others.

Women have no very respected position or *locus standi* in Mongolia. If anything in the life of the country can be called drudgery at all, it certainly falls to the lot of the women. Their claim on their menkind appears to be mainly sexual, for while they are young and pretty they seem to enjoy life and "have a good time" (I am speaking, of course, of life in the capital). They are often very pretty, chic, and healthy looking, for, in sharp contrast with their Chinese sisters, they lead a life of freedom and of open air, ride about everywhere with the men, attend all the festivities that are going on, wear gorgeous apparel and lovely jewels, and, generally speaking, "go the pace".

What they do not know about the gentle art of flirtation is not worth knowing, and the young woman who is unable to attract two or three lovers to her side is, they say, generally looked down upon. The northern Mongols appeared to

me to be remarkably merry and bright as compared with the southern. There is on occasions a great sense of gaiety in Urga when the people seem full of the joy of life, and perhaps the women are wise enough to accept their privileges rather than to worry too much about their rights. Mongols, however, are said to mistrust women greatly, never taking them into their confidence, or allowing them a finger in the pie of any important business transaction.

CHAPTER XIV

"Each path with robes and various dyes bespread,
Seems from afar a moving tulip bed"

—*Tickell*

OUR visit to Urga had been most fortunately timed, and we were delighted to hear within a few days of reaching the capital that the great semi-religious, semi-athletic festival of the Ts'am Haren, or sacred dance, was to take place during the second week in July. A more bewilderingly picturesque and fantastic sight than this presented day after day—held at intervals it prolonged itself over a fortnight—I never expect to see. Proceedings included the presentation of tribute to the Hut'ukt'u, followed by an archery competition, continued with the dance of the gods, a great wrestling tourney, and wound up with a race meeting.

Reminiscent in some degree of their past glories, the Mongol princes and their banner-men came from distant principalities of the dominion to take part in these feats of strength and skill, and at the same time to present their gifts and to do homage to their spiritual and temporal chief. Bogdo, the Hut'ukt'u ("he who is born again"), the Living

God of Mongolia, is nominally the ruling spirit of these festivities, but although his chair of state was always prominently in position, this mighty ruler, whom his subjects believe to be the richest as well as the most potent monarch in the world (has he not 2000 white ponies and a 1000 white camels?), did not come to sit in it. On one occasion only did "He that can do no wrong" put in an appearance, and that was when lamas and princes assembled to hand over to him the money and presents that had been begged from, and squeezed out of, his subjects throughout the length and breadth of Mongolia. Great were the rejoicings when it became known that Bogdo was to be present in person, to receive with his own fair hands the offerings that had been brought to Urga. Bogdo, the Djibson Dampa Lama (Holy Reverence) Edsen Han, as he is severally styled, the chief of all the Hut'ukt'us, by birth a Tibetan, being son of a steward to the Dalai Lama, is a man of middle age, already decrepit, in appearance bloated, dissipated, uninspiring. The spiritual head of the Mongolian Buddhists, he now lays claim, since Mongolia is no longer subject to Chinese rule, to temporal authority as well. Indeed the position of this lama pontiff is of unusual character, and might almost be said to embrace a dual personality. On the one hand, the celibate ruler of priests, the religious leader of the faith. On the other, the crowned emperor of the Mongols; crowned with his wife, and firmly in-

BOGDO'S BODYGUARD

LITTLE LAMA BOYS PLAY 'TAG' ROUND THE BARRIERS

sistent that their ten-year old son should be crowned as his heir, that there should be no room for doubt as to his intentions in regard to the succession to the Mongol throne.

That all actions of the Hut'ukt'u must of necessity be right is ingrained in the minds of his people, and taken quite literally by his adherents. That he, the reincarnation of the sainted historian Taranatha, should openly, and I use the word advisedly, for Mongolia is a wonderful country for winking at things nominally taboo, take unto himself a wife must, even though such action is a violation of all Buddhistic principles, be right, because Bogdo can do no wrong. There are many stories rife as to the iniquities of their ruler, and one that I myself heard on good authority made him responsible for the cruel murder of a well-known Mongol official, whom he is said to have forced into drinking in his presence a cup of poisoned wine.

Into Bogdo's house we did not penetrate. It would have been difficult enough under ordinary circumstances to have obtained an audience, but, as it was, the Hut'ukt'u was in a bad state of health, and moreover it was rumoured that an addition to his family was daily expected. A pleasant ride along the valley of the Tola River brought us to the confines of Bogdo's compound, and we were interested in the queer mixture of styles the house presented. Built of wood, the main part of the structure might have been an English farm-house, but out of all character with

this was the square green tower in the middle of it, and the many little Chinese turrets and pavilions with yellow-tiled roofs. The compound was surrounded by a rough fir tree fence and the place presented an untidy appearance. There was nothing to suggest the immense wealth with which Bogdo is credited, beyond the insignificant fact of a small herd of antelope inside a neighbouring compound. Far more picturesque, at a stone's throw distant, was the residence of the Choi Gin Lama, Bogdo's brother, a well-planted garden surrounding a number of small houses and a temple, all with green roofs and Tibetan in style.

The general arrangements for the Ts'am Haren were carried out with great forethought and method; the discipline and general order as one event followed another would really rival the management of like festivities in the Western world. Our main difficulty was that we could seldom ascertain within a few hours as to when the performances began, and in consequence of this we were always up to time and had a good deal of waiting about. For the presentations to Bogdo great preparations were made; the approaches to the temple were well protected by southern soldiers who supplement the body-guard of the Hut'ukt'u, and the barriers around which the little lama boys played "tag," or a Mongolian form of it, fenced off great spaces across which the unwary foreigners might otherwise have cantered their horses in disrespectful light-heartedness.

The Temple of the Gods, situated on the north side of the stony expanse between the Consulate and West Urga was the centre of a brilliant scene. The body-guard in royal blue silk damask coats with black velvet facings outlined with silver braid, prune coloured waistcoats and pale lemon cummerbunds, formed a valiant looking band enough; their weapons were modern in type, and their clothes apart from being picturesque were, what is far rarer in the extreme East, smart, clean, and in good condition. Quite satisfied with the impression their appearance produced upon me, they showed no little keenness to be photographed.

Inside the barriers the ground was lined on one side with a number of marquees, under which in deep shadow sat the Mongol mandarins, silently contemplative and out of the glare, the richness of the blue-purple and chocolate of their silken garments looking all the richer in the half light. Opposite them, at a distance of 150 yards or so, the rank and file of the lama community were herded together, squatting on the ground and standing in the back rows, thousands of them, from whom from time to time darted forth some naughty boy with the object of exchanging his seat for a better one. A mass of dull Indian red was the effect they produced, unrelieved but for the wonderful banners that had been erected on great frames of wood opposite the temple entrance. The mob was kept within bounds by angry lamas who cut at the people if they pressed forward or

got out of place with sharp little switches. The faces of these men were quite diabolically hideous; their expressions evil and cruel. There is some idea, no doubt, that the uglier the face the more alarming it is.

A group of high lamas in gorgeous vestments of orange and scarlet sat enveloped in their loose folds out of the sun beating down upon an archway, their hard gilded hats, in shape reminding one of the tops of raised pies, glittering where the light filtered through the roof with a metallic brilliance. The crowds are moving now, lamas and "black men" are mingled, although it is an essentially lamaistic occasion and the predominating tones range from lemon to vermilion.

Final preparations are now being made, yards upon yards of Imperial yellow cloth are stretched in a golden pathway from the yourts hidden away inside an inner compound, through the great p'ailou, under which the priests shelter from the sun, and away and beyond to the main entrance to the Temple of the Gods. The yourts behind the palisade form the robing and refreshment rooms for the Hut'ukt'u, and we note a cart drawn by a magnificent bullock pull up outside in order that the huge pots of mares' milk may be lifted from it. Bogdo is within the gates, and none but prelates and princes have access to the sacred precincts. At the portals high lamas sit, and two tall figures support the great state umbrellas of silken embroidery on

CHURCH AND STATE : MONGOL PRINCE AND HIGH LAMA

either side. The heat is intense, and a row of sleepy dignitaries doze uncomfortably on the long benches under the portico. There is a drowsiness about the day, and the hum of conversation is subdued and soothing.

Suddenly there is a stir, and a thrill of expectation runs through all of us. A crowd of princes and mandarins and their sons hurries forth from the little tents and forms up in lines on either side of the golden pathway. Lama officials come forward and thrust lighted joss-sticks into each of the outstretched hands. Space is left between the long rows for three people to walk abreast. A look of intense eagerness, even of anxiety, spreads over the bronzed faces, for their god is but a sick man. A harsh trumpeting presages the approach of their incarnate deity; continuous and raucous. Two heralds, each holding what we suppose to be a glorified "hatag" on his upturned wrists but made of leopard's skin stuffed in the form of an elongated sausage, made their appearance. Following them are the trumpeters, first one and then the other producing a long unbroken wail from his copper and brass instrument which resembles that which I bought as a war trophy months past in Peking.

A posse of lamas in robes and the mitred headdress of high ceremony, looking for all the world like a perambulating bed of nasturtiums in full bloom, precede their pontiff, who, fat, pallid, and ponderous, his diseased eyes protected by round

black glasses, supported (held up, it seemed to us) by a priest on either side, walks labouringly along the yellow cloth. The bearers of the embroidered umbrellas are close upon his heels, and the crowd of privileged persons, priests, and laity, jostling each other for priority, follow in his train to the Temple of the Gods. Humbler lamas from remote corners of Mongolia stand about in little groups. They are there to watch the passing of their god. The feeling is tense. Fervid adoration shines from their straining eyes. Clasped hands stretch forth in expression of profound emotion as the procession winds its way into the temple, up to the tribute throne. There is silence, save for the sound of the heavy footsteps of the central figure as he stumps over the yellow tissue covering the boarded pathway. In an ecstasy of worship the monks prostrate themselves near the threshold of the sanctuary. They have beheld him whom they would fain see: him whom they have travelled footsore and hungry so many miles, for so many weeks, to honour. They are happy. Their faces are sublime. They have reached the haven of their desire.

Lined up along a wall not far from the great gateway to the temple, waiting with radiantly expectant countenances, and bearing their gifts in their hands, are some hundreds of ragged pilgrims. Fifty men of Bogdo's guard are in attendance here, ready when the time comes to marshal them into the Presence. They have

THE GREAT STATE UMBRELLA OF SILKEN EMBROIDERY

IN AN ECSTASY OF WORSHIP THE MONKS PROSTRATE THEMSELVES NEAR THE THRESHOLD OF THE SANCTUARY

been waiting since dawn, but in a state of supreme exaltation. They have drawn the lucky number amongst their fellows, and carry their offerings on trays and platters—little ornaments for the temple altars, sometimes even food have they brought to lay at the feet of their spiritual sovereign. But their turn is not yet. Precedence has been given to the princes and rich men in fine raiment, and these, holding aloft in both hands costly tribute hidden from sight in silken coverings of daffodil yellow, make a wonderful procession as the crowd opens out for them, and they pass from a blaze of sunshine into the dimly mellow light of the great temple interior. A low droning chant rises and falls from the throats of Urga's priests as the doors open and close on the bearers of treasure, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They are so numerous that they can only be admitted in sections of a hundred or so at a time.

Less stirring perhaps, but every whit as picturesque, was the meeting of the archers held on the great grassy expanse between the sacred mountain and the city. I rode out to it to find a scene which suggested a herbaceous flower-bed in bright autumn sunshine. A background of wooded hills rose up in the distance across the Tola River to some 1500 or 1600 feet. The garments of the crowds—the laity were in preponderating forces to-day—were indeed a study in contrasts and harmonies. Pointsettia scarlet vied with pure turquoise and lapis-lazuli blue;

lavender and rich violet, sober mouse colour, pale lemon chrome ranging to vivid orange—the brilliance of a field of parrot tulips such as brought back to my memory the bulb farms in full bloom which surround Haarlem. Cup day at Ascot would seem pale and anæmic as compared with this Mongolian toxophilite display.

At one end of the ground were half a dozen little marquees, light or dark blue linen *appliqué* with yellow and white devices. Under them, upon comfortable square cushions, sat the princes and princesses, the mandarins and their wives, with sundry other officials. Surrounding them were the crowds, and again, like a wall beyond, hundreds and hundreds of ponies were tethered, for no one ever dreams of walking in Mongolia. In front of the tents at the south end of the ground were half a dozen stances for the archers. They shot in pairs, princes and peasants alike, and undistinguished save for the badge of office in the form of the peacock's feather which protudes horizontal from the crown of the round pork-pie hat with red streamers, and by the richer material of the garments. They had four shots apiece, and their range was about seventy to seventy-five yards distance.

The competitors were in great force, and coming out eight or ten at a time they ranged themselves in couples at the stances, bowed low to the magnates in the marquees, saluted the butts likewise, and let fly their heavy, ivory-tipped

THE MEETING OF THE ARCHERS
'RANGED THEMSELVES IN COUPLES AT THE STANCES'

SCORING THE HITS AT THE BUTTS

arrows—not at targets, but at birch-bark rings piled loosely as a child might build a "castle" with his bricks one on top of the other, and making little low walls of perhaps ten or twelve feet in length by eighteen inches high. At the butts were a number of men scoring the hits, and as the arrows flew they flapped their long arms above their heads and chanted a sort of dirge-like incantation, not dissimilar to that with which our sailors accompany the hauling in of anchor cables.

The song rose and fell, crescendo and diminuendo, in harmony with the success or failure of the competitors. A gentle swaying movement of the crowds as their eyes followed the arrows was like a corn-field shivering in waves as the breeze stirs it. The umpires stood right in the line of the hurtling missiles, and little lamas in embryo, bare-footed and bare-limbed, gathered the arrows as they fell, tripping back with them to the archers like sun-kissed amorini with their quivers full. The utmost order prevailed, and this event, as were also the others, was organised to perfection.

The Dance of the Gods which took place in the spacious outer courtyard of the temple was similar in effect to the Devil Dances I had watched with such interest at the lama temple in Peking in the previous spring. The ground was marked out in sections and all operations were directed towards a canopy of yellow silk ornamented with conventional devices in blue,

beneath which the throne of the Hut'ukt'u was placed. That he would be present in *persona propria* nobody expected, but in his absence all honour was paid to the space which should have been occupied by him.

The status of Russia was officially recognised by the erection of a special marquee not far from that of the Bogdo, and under this the Russian Consul sat cross-legged and perspiring, supported by a number of officials, an interpreter, and his handsome Persian valet at his elbow. A large number of Russians also stood and looked on at the weird gyrations of the masked dancers which continued untiringly hour after hour beneath a fierce sun beating mercilessly down upon the thousands of spectators fringing this gritty and treeless expanse. Picturesque and novel though the dancing was, it became monotonous after a while as troop after troop of actors, concealed beneath the most grotesque masks which covered their heads and shoulders, issued forth in turn, and went through what appeared to us to be the same evolutions one after the other. It is very difficult to arrive at any exact interpretation of such religious dances, but the most likely explanation is that the scenes gone through are a representation in pantomime of incidents in the early history of Buddhism. The dancers are masked to represent the gods, mythological animals, and hideous devils, and they prance about the chalked-in area to the strains of

A MASK AT THE DANCE OF THE GODS

A MONGOL PRINCESS WEARING A HEAD-DRESS OF GOLD

Tibetan trumpets and other weird sounds. The gods, whose amiable and pallid countenances very naturally bear strong resemblance to the sublime expression of contemplation admired by the Chinese, overcome the devils in due course, but to our disappointment by the means of peaceful exorcism and not by muscular conflict. This sort of thing continued for the best part of a day, and it was easy to see that the spectators grew bored, for the majority were as ignorant, we were told, as we ourselves as to what it was all about.

Attendance at the sacred dance may to some extent have been a matter of obligation on the part of a considerable proportion of the audience, but for the subsequent event, the annual wrestling competition, it was a very different story, and the approaches to the ground were thronged by men, women, and children, about whose keenness there was little room for doubt. As far as the arrangement of the ground was concerned, proceedings followed to a large extent those of the previous occasions. The main difference, as far as I was able to observe, seemed to be that all the princesses in Urga (if they were all princesses) were present in order to lend encouragement to their swains. Seated demurely enough in rows, these charming little ladies displayed their wonderful jewels and clothes to vast advantage. Beneath their hats was to be discerned the gold headdress that is worn only on very special

occasions. In shape similar to an inverted finger-bowl and of open-work design, many of them were made of gold and must have been uncomfortably heavy on this hot day. Suspended from the frame were strings of pearls, and a modest estimate of these suggested that some of these grand ladies wore from 300 to 400 pearls, many of them as large as peas and quite perfect in colour. In this great mixed assembly they doubtless felt that their dignity behoved them to present a formal appearance, but the brown eyes and rosy lips looked merry enough, and one caught mocking and seductive glances shooting backwards and forwards in spite of all their primness.

The loose long coats worn habitually by the Mongol men conceal successfully their proportions and claims to physical development, and it was with some interest that we watched the wrestlers prepare for the ring. Their faces, burned alternately by the strong sun and rasped by icy winds, are usually weathered to the colour of old copper, and one is astonished to see when they are stripped that their bodies are as fair as those of the average Englishman. Strong rather than agile in appearance, these braves, lamas and laymen alike, practice from the time they are little boys and train seriously when the opportunity offers; they are as hard as nails when the time comes for their prowess to be put to the test.

The signal is given, and four pairs of competitors enter the gladiatorial ring, each being arranged at a given point and closely watched by a couple of umpires, who, acting as backers into the bargain, never cease pouring advice and encouragement upon them, occasionally even punctuating their sentiments by administering resounding smacks on the softer portions of their anatomy. Before getting to work, however, convention has prescribed, doubtless from time immemorial, that salutations shall be offered to the gods, or to the presiding deity, be he who he may. Alas for the influence of Western ways! The feet of the deity who should have presided have developed perhaps just a shade too big even for his Mongol boots, and salutations must be made instead to that empty symbol of sovereignty, the unoccupied throne of the absent Hut'ukt'u.

Moving in single file towards the northern end of the ground, exclaiming as they go, the gladiators advance one by one to the empty chair literally by leaps and bounds. Their prancing action brings the knees up to the stomach with every step, and they present the most ludicrous sight imaginable. Arrived at the dais, the braves leap in the air, fall on their knees, and touching the ground three times with their foreheads, perform profound obeisance.

The bout began, and to the eyes of the uninitiated it appeared in some instances a trial of brains rather than of muscles. A smart trick would send one man down with lightning celerity, and at once

the victor would prance off again to tell that vacant throne that he had won. In other cases a pair would remain in close embrace for several minutes, motionless, and apparently thoughtful. Here one could only suppose that endurance was playing its part, since for no apparent reason one of the men would suddenly collapse, and the other would fly off to tell the story. Notwithstanding my lack of technical knowledge, I found this an absorbingly interesting form of entertainment, and rejoiced to hear from the Norwegian, German, Russian, and Englishman that these well-made specimens of humanity were sportsmen in every sense of the word, that they played the game as well as any Westerner. Indeed they may be said in one respect to set an example to the Western world in the total disparity of the reward to the merit that had attained it. A handful of little cakes, the greater part of which were distributed among his friends by the victor, formed the entire "purse" for which he fought. The honour of the thing is good enough for these uncivilised Mongols.

The closing event of the festival of Ts'am was most enjoyable of all, and I feel that I cannot improve upon the description given by Mr. Gull in the paper which he read before the Central Asian Society on his return to England. "The race meeting was held in a beautiful green valley a little east of Urga. We rode out to it in a merry party of Mongols and their wives, who, though in

gala array, rode astride. There were thirty entries for a race over flat open country for five miles. The jockeys were little boys and girls, the youngest eight, the oldest not more than fourteen. The ponies, their riders up and singing in chorus, paraded in a circle between tents coloured light and dark blue. Presently a lama in flowing robes of yellow with a pennon at the end of a lance placed himself at the head of the line, and the slow parade broke into a trot. Four or five times the circle was completed till the trot momentarily quickening became a fast canter. Then the excitement of the ponies worked up to a pitch, the lama gave the signal. With a sweep of his lance he shot off at a gallop the circle behind him uncoiling like a lasso. It spread out towards the plain racing towards a bend in the hills, the actual starting-point. We followed for a little and then dismounting we waited until in straggling file, flanked by those who had gone all the way, the competitors reappeared. The first home was a girl with a sash of orange bound round her jet black hair. A mounted lama caught her bridle and led her up to each of the tents in turn. Before each he intoned a prayer, and at the last the girl was handed a bowl of milk, and milk was poured over her pony's head. Each of the competitors was then taken up to the tents in turn, and each pony anointed in the same way. At the end of the afternoon the owners and others stripped off their clothes and wrestled until the sun, crowned

with a floating splendour of flame sank behind the hills."

The friendliness of the Mongols towards Europeans was on this occasion decidedly marked, and in company with half a dozen Russian officers who had brought over a number of their men to see the sport, we were entertained "at tea" in one of the pale blue tents near the winning-post. We all sat on the ground in a row, cross-legged, and the lamas handed round queer little Chinese cakes and bowls of mares' milk. The latter looked dirty but was really not at all bad to taste.

Our meeting under these strange but pleasant circumstances with the Russian officers led to the establishment of cordial relations between us, in spite of the fact, which surprised us not a little, that one only of their number knew any language other than their own. This great burly fellow, a Captain in a Siberian rifle corps, was hail-fellow-well-met directly he saw us, and, coming from the Baltic provinces, spoke German fluently. We took advantage a few days later of his invitation to ride over to his quarters that we might see something of the extensive new barracks which are being built by the Russians. The soldiers are at present mainly housed in barracks which were begun by the Chinese, who in 1910 proposed to keep a small force there. Anyone more hospitable than these gallant Russians I have seldom met, but their notions of entertainment did not run on

A WRESTLING BOUT

YOUNG LAMAS.

lines exactly parallel with our own, and it was impossible to persuade them that I really did not like my tea half-and-half with neat brandy, and that in view of a very solitary ride home across dangerous country there were limits to my capacity for drinking vodka.

I fancy that some of these officers, though nominally this Mongolian exile is very distasteful to them, manage to amuse themselves and to take advantage of the great possibilities of sport that this region offers; they extended to us a variety of inducements such as expeditions after bear, lynx, and wolves, to say nothing of wild-fowl shooting, if we would remain in Urga long enough. There is plenty of bird and animal life both in South and North Mongolia, harrier eagles, vultures, sheldrakes, bustards, geese, ducks, magpies, crows and larks abounding, while in North Mongolia beautiful herons, always seen in couples, were so tame that they allowed one to get within very short range before spreading their wings and sailing away.

CHAPTER XV

"It is only kindness and not severity that can impress at the distance of a thousand miles"

—*Chinese proverb*

AMONG all the brightness and sparkle of life in Urga, there is alas! a very dark and sinister side. Day after day, we rode past a certain little inconspicuous enclosure surrounded by a rough pine stockade, little recking of the appalling amount of misery it encompassed. How far circumstances and how far sheer native cruelty are responsible for the terrible condition under which the Mongols drag out a ghastly existence in punishment for crimes either great or small, and even prior to condemnation, it would be difficult to establish. Deprivation of liberty and rigorous confinement is the accepted form of punishment held by the Mongols in common with all nations of modern civilisation, and the present form probably originated before there was any other way of imprisoning malefactors than the felt yourt of the nomad, from which, of course, any prisoner could escape in ten minutes.

Few, if any, Europeans other than Russians have seen the inside of this Mongol prison; and

truly the dungeons at Urga beggar description. Through the kind offices of one of our Russian friends we obtained a pass from the Mongol Government to enable us to visit the prisoners. The authorities were not a little suspicious as to our object in wishing to do so, and since a reason had perforce to be furnished, they were informed that we were merely humane travellers who desired to distribute largesse among the suffering inmates. Accompanied by a couple of Mongol officials, three Russians, and Mr. Gull, I was taken over the entire place, and I believe that none of its horrors escaped me.

It would indeed be a hard heart that did not open to the hopeless misery of the prisoners. Within a small compound fenced in by high spiked palisades are five or six dungeons. The dungeons are thrice enclosed by a stockade of rough pine-wood some eighteen feet high, and to gain access to them many heavily bolted doors have to be unbarred. All the doors were double, and two great padlocks ensured the security of each. As we entered, the gaolers, who struck us as being a most unholy looking couple who literally gloated over the misery of the prisoners in their power, met us, and called our attention, quite unnecessarily, to a trio of pale-faced Mongols sitting on the ground just inside the gates. Their hands and feet were heavily chained together, and they fell on their knees when they saw us. We had each contributed three roubles before entering the

prison, and, having reduced it to small change, one of the party doled it out, making the sum go as far as possible among the miserable suppliants.

Passing on to the interior, we came upon a heavy wooden chest, some 4 to 4½ feet long by 2½ feet deep, iron-bound and secured by two strong padlocks. To our horror we discovered that it contained a man—one might have imagined that a wild beast to be sent by train was temporarily imprisoned therein! But a man! The hole in the side was of sufficient size to enable the prisoner to thrust out his manacled hands. This also provided the sole means of ventilation. But this unfortunate creature was well off compared with the others we saw subsequently. At least he was breathing in the open air. The dungeons, we were told, were so full that this prisoner had to remain outside. While we were discussing his pitiable lot, clank, clank, went the great bars and bolts, and the gaoler had opened the double doors leading into the first dungeon. There must have been from twenty to thirty coffins in this, some piled on the tops of the others, and the atmosphere was absolutely putrid. The two Mongol officials, whose general tone I cannot say impressed us very favourably, now very ostentatiously held their long sleeves over their noses, accustomed to smells though they were. One imagines that there may have been some means of cleaning out the coffins from underneath as is the case in cages in a menagerie, for it was most strongly

PRISONERS AT URGA, SHUT UP FOR THE REMAINDER OF THEIR LIVES IN HEAVY IRON-BOUND COFFINS

impressed upon us that never under any circumstances whatsoever are the prisoners allowed to come out except for execution or — rarely — to be set free. The majority are in for life sentences.

One's eyes growing accustomed to the darkness —the only light that penetrates it is from the doors when they are opened—one became gradually aware of wild shaggy heads poking through the round holes in the coffin's sides. I was standing, quite unconsciously, close to a coffin, when, glancing down, I saw a terrible face, nothing more, almost touching the skirt of my riding coat. Beside one coffin was a pool of blood which told its own tale. Within it there was a poor devil coughing his lungs up. The Russian officer, knowing Mongolian well, spoke a few words to one or two of them, but they seemed too dazed to understand. Their minds, like their limbs, quickly atrophy in this close confinement. After a breath of fresh air in the tiny space that separates the dungeons, which, by the way, are four or five feet below ground level, another double door was unbarred for us, and we entered the second dungeon where there were a similar number of Chinese, in the coffins. It struck us as infinitely sad to find these gentle, highly civilised Chinese here, Shansi merchants most of them, friends and neighbours no doubt of the men with whom we had drunk tea in their charming guild rooms adjoining the little temple in Mai-mai-ch'eng. There they were, shut

up for the remainder of their lives in heavy iron-bound coffins, out of which they could never under any conditions or for any purpose move. They could not lie down flat, they could not sit upright, they were not only manacled but chained to the coffins. They saw daylight but for a few minutes, when their food was thrust into their coffins through a hole four or five inches in diameter, twice daily. In one way only did they score over their Mongolian fellow-sufferers. Their narrower Chinese skulls enabled them, painfully and with difficulty, to protrude their heads through the hole in the coffin side. The Mongol cranium is too wide to do so at all.

Mr. Gull talked to the Chinese as long as the brutal-looking gaolers would let him, and I admired the pluck which enabled him to remain so long in that fearsome atmosphere. The men told him that all they knew was that they were suspected of supporting the Chinese Republic at the time of the Mongol declaration of independence. They had apparently had no trial, and they saw not the slightest chance of escape from this appalling situation. They seemed thankful to have a few words with anyone in their own tongue.

There were five dungeons and we went into all of them. It was impossible in the dim light to estimate how many prisoners they contained, and one got very varying figures, but I imagine that the total must be in the neighbourhood of 150. One of the Russians wished to take a photograph

of the three prisoners outside, and the brutes of gaolers held their hands when they tried to cover their faces. I felt that one ought not insult their misery by doing such a thing. Indeed, no matter what their crimes, one had nothing but the deepest pity for the prisoners. We were profoundly moved by all the experiences of the afternoon and rode back much saddened in the twilight to Mai-mai-ch'eng. Nothing I can ever see in the future will wipe out the memory of that terrible prison.

What I had learned of the prison system in Urga helped me the better to understand what I saw later on. I was present, not indeed from any morbid curiosity, but in order to witness the much-vaunted Mongol courage in the face of death, at the execution of three Mongol soldiers, who six months before had murdered their general, Gen Dung Geng, and since that time had been dragging out their lives in those awful coffins.

A perfect July morning. The ride over the short turf for miles along the wide valley to the north-east of Urga made us forgetful for the time being of the gruesome object of our expedition. Three of the soldiers who had murdered their general—the prince, who had led them 400 strong against 4000 Chinese within the walled city of Kobdo, and whose title was the reward of his conquest—were to be executed. Discipline among his ranks had been terribly severe; his soldiers hated him, and the glory with which they were

covered as a consequence of their victory did not outweigh the rancour in their hearts. A chosen few were supported without exception by their fellows. They were unanimous to a man.

The prince must die. They rose against him on the morning of an ice-bound day in January, and twenty Mauser rifles emptied their lead into his body. Miraculous seemed the strength possessed by the General. A bullet shattered his thigh, but he continued to run. The soldiers hesitated when they saw that he did not fall. For one English mile he fled from his pursuers, limping but swift. To the city he fled, and people ran out from their dwellings to ask the reason for such doings. They were out of earshot when the answer came flinging back to them. But as he ran he called to those that would have come up with him, "Stand away from me, or you also will surely be killed," and in his agony he pushed into a place of safety some little children who were in his path. His heart was tender in spite of the severity of his discipline.

He ran; and coming to a gateway where he might hope to find sanctuary, he threw himself with all his force against the door. He was a strong man, and the door fell in, and he with it. He lay as he fell. His own soldiers came quickly up with him, and to the first he cried, "Kill me, then, that I may enter the new life without further delay". And straightway the man shot him through the head.

. . . And we sat on the hill-side and waited, while our ponies found fodder more luscious than that to which they were accustomed on the nearer plains. We waited for over two hours. The Mongols are not a punctual people.

Presently, riding in twos and threes, they came straggling over the hill; the hill that shall obscure from view the bloody deed which must be carried out without the knowledge of the gods, which on no account may take place within sight of the sacred mountain of Bogdo-N'or upon whose face all Urga gazes.

The horsemen rode slowly across the mountain, for they knew that more slowly still would the ox-carts with their mounted escort of soldiers from the south wend their way around its foot. Besides, there was no hurry. The prince's soldiers, three only of the many who were eating their hearts out in those awful dungeons, were to die to-day for his murder.

Some sixty or seventy Chinese herded together near us, a cheery, chattering crowd, make a jarring note in this sombre atmosphere. They rejoice to witness death, more especially when a Mongol is to die. They sit apart from all others. There is no natural affinity between these warring races; and the chances just now are that in the near future Mongolia's relations with her celestial neighbours may be fundamentally altered.

Suddenly round the bend of the valley appears

a multi-coloured little group of riders, the predominant tint being the blue uniforms of the southern soldiers making general harmony with the grey-green of the grass on the slopes. They are quickly within range, and by the peacock plumes in their velvet hats one sees that many officials accompany the criminals. There, in the midst of the soldiers, are the primitive little ox-carts, two of them, and in them sit, arms tightly bound to their backs, the shock-headed criminals. Shock-headed and bearded they have become during their sojourn in the coffins in which they have been closely confined in Urga's dungeons. Death is indisputably preferable to imprisonment in Mongolia. One of the trio, in spite of the terrible six months through which he has passed, is full of life and vigour, and he shouts up in a truculent manner to the officials who have gathered together in a little tent overlooking the stakes to which later on the prisoners are to be bound, "Hi, you there," he calls, "don't go and hide yourselves inside the tent. You have to watch our execution. Come out and see us die." And when the simple meal, with which they are served immediately before the execution takes place, is served to them—unable to feed themselves, the bowls are held to their lips by the gaolers—this same man demands his rights, and asks for meat and tea instead of the water and tsamba which are given to him.

And then—having satisfied their hunger, they

are quickly and securely bound in kneeling posture to the stakes. For the last time the sturdy ruffian expostulates at not being allowed to face the fire. "Why do you not let us face the guns?" he argued. "Why will you not allow us to die like soldiers?" This position is ignominious. It is unworthy of their traditions. But no notice is taken of him, and perhaps his earlier discipline impels him to submit without further demur. A lama, carrying in his hands a framed picture of the Great Prophet, walks in front of the captives. What he says to them we cannot hear, but one replies, "I only want to be a soldier when I am born again". The three gaze reverently enough at the Buddha, and perhaps pray to him that their lot in the speedy re-incarnation, which they confidently anticipate, may be cast in pleasanter places. The lama retires, and with a startling rapidity, three blue-clad soldiers have placed themselves at close range, five yards at most from the murderers, and then—thud, thud, and the dust on the hill beyond puffs up in three little clouds. The heads of two of the men fall backwards with a jerk on their necks. The bullets have done their work. But custom demands that a second and even a third round shall be fired. Then we see that one of the men, the central figure of the group, is still alive, and the awful thing is that no one but ourselves appears to give heed to the fact, until the Norwegian runs down the hill to the unfortunate victim and calls the attention of the

Mongols to his condition. Five minutes—they seem like hours—pass before one of the troop of soldiers, already mounted and galloping up the hill towards Urga, is called back. He dismounts, kneels, and takes aim and fires. There is no mistake about the despatch this time. The poor wretch has died hard indeed.

We are a very quiet little party as we ride slowly homewards through the valleys. Away behind us the kites circle round the spot we have just left; waiting until the last of the crowd has taken himself off. A human vulture has paid a few kopecks for the privilege of stripping those three poor bodies of the filthy clothes in which they so bravely expiated their crime, and he too waits until we are all out of sight before he commences his gruesome task. And the dogs, the ghoulish dogs that infest Urga, will compete with the vultures.

CHAPTER XVI

"Those who know do not speak; those speak who do not know"

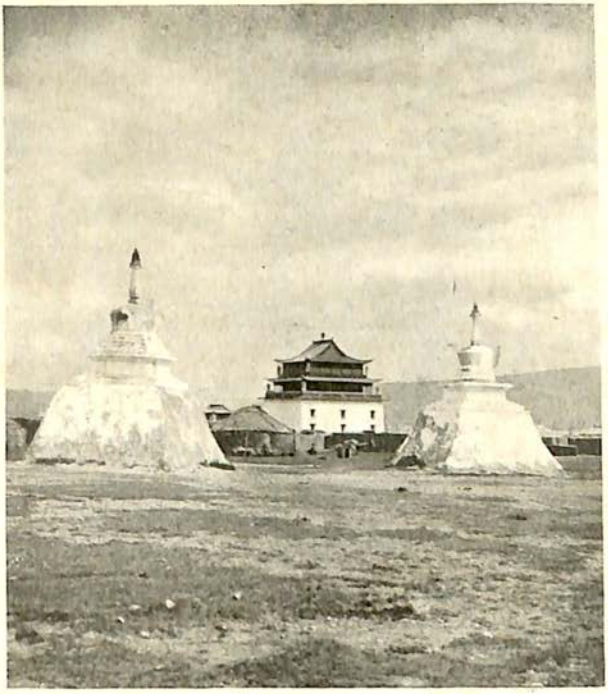
—*Chinese proverb*

THE Mongol belief in an immediate re-incarnation leads them to be entirely careless of their dead, and the only description of tomb I saw in Urga were a couple of dagobas erected over priests' graves. "What does it matter?" they say. "The body is only a case for the spirit, and the spirit is at once born again into a new case." I think that herein lies the reason they never seem to trouble to wash their "cases". Corpses are carried out on to the hill-side on the tail of an ox-cart, a lama accompanying the man in charge of it. The lama selects an auspicious spot; the man whips up his pony, jerks the corpse to the ground, and they drive quickly off without looking back. The rest is left to luck. If the body is rapidly devoured by wild beasts and birds of prey, the virtue of the deceased is established in the face of any evidence to the contrary. If, however, the process of dissolution is protracted, a bad name will cling to the reputation of the departed and also reflect

inconveniently on his surviving family as long as spiteful memory permits.

A lasting impression of Urga is that of a city strewn with bones, and horrible, ghoulish, and terribly savage dogs prowling among them. You may count these dogs sometimes in hundreds about the refuse heaps that surround Urga. Often they may be seen silently gnawing, gnawing away at something which makes you shudder as you ride quickly past. One never ventures outside one's door unarmed, for in winter the dogs are very fierce with hunger, and in summer there is always danger of meeting a mad brute. Only a few months before we stayed there a young lama from the temple just outside our compound was torn to pieces by these pariah dogs. He was a fine strong young man, but had gone forth alone one winter's day and was without a weapon. A number of dogs attacked him and before anyone could respond to his cries they had dragged him away to a neighbouring refuse heap and there torn him limb from limb. The dogs belong to nobody, and as well as being a constant source of danger, they are most repulsive looking creatures, always unsightly from some horrible disease that seems to beset them. The Mongol view is that these dogs act as scavengers and so save them the trouble of disposing of their refuse.

Cut off completely from the world, as it seemed, I received neither letters nor news of outside



A TOMB IN URGA
DAGOBAS ERECTED OVNR PRIESTS' GRAVES

SOUTHERN SOLDIERS

affairs, nor did I observe during this gala time at Urga much evidence as to the unsettled state of Chinese and Mongolian political matters. An occasional telegram was received by my host from his colleague at Kalgan telling him something of the movements of the two opposing forces, but it was little that we learned as to what was happening, and if one had remained much longer there one would certainly have come to regard Urga as the centre of the universe, and to attach paramount importance to Mongolia as a political unit.

The news, therefore, that Mr. Grant, a young Scotsman engaged in the Chinese telegraph service, had been murdered by Mongol soldiery at Ta-Bol was a great shock. We had met the companion who set out with him, the preparations for whose expedition I had watched with such interest three months before from the mission compound at Kalgan, when we passed through Verkne-Oudinsk, and were told by him that Mr. Grant would probably reach Urga before we left it. The story as it came to us through Mongol sources was that Hung-hu-tzes had descended upon this poor young fellow for food at an isolated telegraph station, and that when they had exhausted his supplies, he, though resenting their importunities, had despatched urgent messages to the Chinese Government for relief. It is said that a telegram was sent to Yuan Shih K'ai himself; but the Chinese Government were apathetic, or they did not see the force of feeding this robber

band whose object was to destroy their men, when it was all they could do to supply their own soldiers with the barest necessities. In any case, no relief came, and Grant in desperation, no Chinese or Mongol being willing to undertake the journey, finally set off to Kalgan that he might obtain the stores necessary in order to continue his tour of inspection north. Why the authorities allowed him to return under the conditions prevailing in Inner Mongolia at that time it is difficult to understand. Be that as it may, upon reaching Ta-Bol again in company with three Chinese he was apparently captured by Mongol soldiers, who met him with the demand that he should hand over his supplies and his Chinese as well to them. He should go free, they said, if he complied, but if he refused they would kill him.

To his eternal honour be it recorded that Grant stood by his Chinese companions. The Mongols, although they murdered him in cold blood, have at least been forced to admit that the white man was their equal in their boasted bravery; that he knew something of which they know nothing—the supreme virtue of self-sacrifice. He did not die with the satisfaction of knowing that he was saving the life of others in so doing—one hopes that many of us would be capable of paying that price for such a reward. He died because he would not save his own life at the price of blood even though that blood was inevitably to be shed. From Mongol lips the account of the final scene

comes to us. Announcing their intention of putting him to death, soldiers crowded round him to take him captive. He jeered that so large a number should be necessary to bind a single man. "We will soon stop your laughing," they said, and lining up twenty men they shot him down.

Grant met his death in such a manner as to make his nation proud of him. His action, combined with his last brave words, was of a gallantry that places him high in the company of heroes. "You may kill me, but you can never frighten me," he said. A month or more later his body was found with a bullet through the head, as were the bodies of the three Chinese with whom he died rather than leave to their fate. Though the murderers had fled, the camp near which the bodies were found still remained, and it was on that account that they were found undisturbed; that the wolves and vultures had left them untouched. It would almost seem as though the Mongols, having done their worst, had guarded the remains; as though they realised that a hero's death must surely be avenged.

Although, as I have said, there was little enough on the surface in the capital to suggest that a few hundred miles away fighting was in progress and unrest was prevalent, one could not describe Urga as being either a peaceful or a soothing place in which to settle. The fact that one must always keep a loaded rifle at hand does not make for that. A somewhat "nervy" little experience

of my own one night was when I heard rifle and revolver shots too near to be exactly a lullaby. Creeping out into the compound, my revolver at full cock, and taking cover under shadow of the low Chinese buildings that bordered it, I discovered that a Mongol was sitting upon my roof taking pot shots at his enemy over the wall. This is the one and only time that I think I can claim literally to have been "under fire".

Another uncomfortable moment was one night in riding home in the dark after dining with our Russian friends, when we inadvertently disturbed a horde of pariah dogs very busily engaged in gnawing at—heaven knows what! Several of them leapt up angrily at us, and there was temporary uncertainty as to whether we might not be in for an extremely ugly time of it. At night, too, our ponies were fearfully nervous, and after a violent "shy" because my fellow-traveller struck a match to light a cigarette, my little brute chucked me over his head most unexpectedly when, on reaching the compound gates, I essayed to rouse the inmates by banging on the doors with my riding-crop. We learned before leaving Urga that to be out after dark was looked upon as exceedingly rash and unwise, and before we left that city an order was issued by the Mongol Government to the effect that no one was to go outside his house after 8 p.m.; that in one house in every twelve a man was to sit up all night in order to give warning should Hung-hu-tzes

threaten; and that in every house or yourt a light was to be kept burning all night.

These were not exactly reassuring auspices under which to make our way back along the lonely tracks to civilisation. It decided us, in fact, to give up the idea of taking a different route back in order to visit the gold mines in the Iro district, for it was especially in that neighbourhood that there was most likelihood of meeting desperate and evil characters. Anxious therefore to prolong our stay in Urga to the limit of the time we had at our disposal, we decided to cut the journey back to Siberia as short as possible and travel "orton" in as rapid stages as might be. The Russian Consul was very good in helping us to make our arrangements. In fact, the uncomfortable feeling lingered unexpressed at the backs of our minds that friendly though he had been, he would not be sorry to see us turn our faces from Urga. It is obvious that the Russians would not like a couple of inquisitive foreigners poking their noses into all sorts of corners, especially in a country where Russian jurisdiction is in the balance and control by no means complete.

An antediluvian tarantass was procured, and we were told that the owner lived in Kiachta and that we might deposit it there for him. The small sum of ten roubles seemed to ensure sufficient repair being carried out on it to see us through the two hundred miles that lay between

Urga and our destination. The first day of August was spent in packing up and making preparations for our journey, which we hoped to compass in four instead of the seven days we had taken in coming. The friends we had made during our stay came to speed us on our way and regaled us during tea-time with stories of adventures that travellers had met with on previous occasions over the same road. The Consul, very genial and cheery himself, brought us our "huchaos" as well as the passes which would enable us to carry our weapons out of Mongolia and through Russian territory. Our last evening, as we fondly thought, we spent on the banks of the Tola River, and with the whitened skull of a camel for a target we tried to improve our marksmanship with the Mauser in the twilight, using up all the ammunition we dared spare from the possible requirements on the journey home.

CHAPTER XVII

"To spoil what is good by unreasonableness is like letting off fireworks in the rain"

—Chinese proverb

AGAIN we had reckoned without our—Mongols. Rising betimes and being from an early hour in a state of preparedness, we sat down and waited for the appearance of our tarantass, our horses, and our men. We waited all day, and in the evening gave them up as a bad job and went off for a final ride over the short springy turf among the foothills surrounding the holy city. Next day, five weeks exactly since we had left Kiachta, the Mongols arrived before 8 a.m., but such are their feckless and procrastinating ways, that it was noon before they were ready to start. Our first halt came all too soon, for we were not more than 300 yards from the compound gates when we had smash number one. This, by the way, was the first and last time that I have ever seen a Mongol unseated, and to do him justice, the man came off his pony, not from having lost his grip, but in preference to being crushed against the palings of the temple we were passing.

We had started off three men short, and one of the ponies, never having been used to draw anything before, and being, moreover, extremely fresh, took advantage of the situation to jib, throw its rider, and bolt off across the valley. Without a moment's delay, the other Mongol freed his steed from the tarantass and sped off after the runaway. We were left sitting in the tarantass. The pony, after a wild chase, was caught again, and then in order to knock the stuffing out of him a little, his owner, belabouring him freely, took him for a sharp gallop. Meanwhile, and just as we were ready to depart once more, the rascally horse-dealer, who, by the way, had been our next-door neighbour as well, rode up, obviously in a state of indignant excitement. Mr. Mamen, our Norwegian friend, who, hearing of our smash, had come along to help if he could, explained that the man was very angry and was under the impression that we had insulted him.

The story of the skull, the *casus belli* with the horse-dealer, brings back to me considerable regret. Ten days or so prior to our departure I had found on a hill-side some distance from Urga a fine, and apparently, clean, specimen of Mongol skull, and tyro in the subject that I was, thought that to possess and take it home with me would be interesting from an anthropological point of view. Threading a bit of string through the eye socket, therefore, I tied the skull to my saddle and rode back with it. My friends very

kindly, instead of crushing my aspirations, suggested that to let it steep for a few days in a pail of disinfectant might be a wise and sanitary precaution. When, however, I wanted to pack it up, I found on pouring off the disinfectant, that the dogs and vultures had not performed their functions with the thoroughness that I had anticipated, and that the cranium was still half full of decomposed cerebral matter. My Chinese boy, of course, would not look at it, and I could persuade neither of my European companions to clean out the thing for me. The easiest way out of the difficulty seemed to be to leave the skull behind. As soon, however, as we had taken our departure, the boy in clearing up took the pail and its contents to a neighbouring dust-heap and deposited the latter thereon.

Our Mongol horse-dealer had unfortunately been cognisant of the proceedings, and, on the look out, no doubt, for a grievance, had jumped on his horse that he might overtake us and complain of our action in leaving the skull so near to the confines of his compound. We apologised, of course, and tried to impress upon him the fact that we had intended no insult. Noticing that he still appeared irate, my noble fellow-traveller, with the object, I believe, of leaving nothing but pleasant impressions behind, offered to go back and to remove the skull from the vicinity. A further delay, and he re-appeared, bringing with him a bulky parcel tied up in

a newspaper. My penitence was not assumed, and coals of fire were heaped on my head when not one solitary word of reproach was uttered as we packed my very gruesome possession away in the bottom of the tarantass. Even now it was in no pleasant condition for transporting by civilised routes through Europe, and I willingly agreed that it would be as well to rid ourselves of the encumbrance at the first opportunity. To remind me of that incident, even ever so gently, during the rest of the journey was to render me immediately docile and amenable to any scheme, no matter how distasteful it might be.

We picked up our remaining Mongols in Urga, and bade adieu to the Russian officer, Captain Gabriek, who came to see us off, give us some parting words of advice, and take a photograph of us as a souvenir. We were nearing the top of the first hill out of the capital when smash number two occurred. The new pole which had been fixed across the shafts of the tarantass and was being carried in the usual way athwart the saddles of four Mongols, suddenly broke in two, and, without a moment's warning, the tarantass began to trundle backwards down the incline. We sat tight, expecting to turn over every minute, the Mongols, who are useless in a crisis, looking on aghast at what had happened. We fetched up against a heap of stones in a manner truly providential, when, keeping the right side uppermost, we disembarked, and set

the Mongols to work on mending the broken pole. The opportunity having arrived, I took advantage of all their attention being concentrated elsewhere to walk off with the newspaper parcel containing the skull, and sauntering away to some distant bushes, I concealed my burden amongst them. Years hence some Sherlock Holmes will doubtless discover it, and making four out of two plus three, will with his customary acumen come to the conclusion that a dastardly crime has been committed here; that some brutal Englishman has murdered a Mongol and disposing of the body (heaven knows how!) has attempted to conceal the head by wrapping it in a copy of the "North China Herald," and leaving it by the wayside. You never can tell.

We were forced into the position of making the best of a very bad job as far as the repair to our broken pole was concerned, and came to the conclusion that it would not bear the severe strain of descending the long road which led down to the farther side of the Urga Pass, up which we had trudged so cheerily little more than a month before. So, with a couple of ropes to haul the tarantass back in order to avoid weight on the pole, we allowed the now somewhat subdued Mongols to take it down, while we ourselves led their ponies. Our accident delayed us for over an hour, and this, combined with our tardy start, made us very late in arriving at the end of the first stage. Here a relay of men and

horses was forthcoming, and we did our best to instil into them caution as regards the fragile condition of our conveyance. The way diverged considerably from the route our Jamschik had taken in bringing us, and before reaching our night quarters we had a somewhat disconcerting stream to negotiate. Under ordinary conditions the Mongols would have raced over and torn up the steep bank on the farther side with wild "Hoop-la's". Our broken pole necessitated a very different procedure, and there was nothing for it but "all hands to the wheels" and to push the heavy tarantass across. They gave me one of the ponies to ride, but what with the water being deep and the pony splashing about I think I got as wet as they did. Mongols detest getting even their feet wet and made a prodigious fuss before they could be induced to wade.

Our men on this stage were not a particularly ingratiating set, and, though the subject did not come up for discussion, neither of us felt any too safe in their hands. Their character was disclosed when we arrived at our destination for the night, and they tried to force us into paying eight roubles instead of the usual three, or the actual five, which we offered them. The Mongols bluffed all they knew, and swore (one of them spoke enough Chinese to act as interpreter) that the sum of eight roubles was entered in black and white upon our "huchao," or posting permit. My less pugnacious companion was for paying and

thus saving discussion, but I felt that to give in at so early a stage would mean being bullied at every subsequent one, and I therefore gave them to understand that I would go back to Urga with them in the morning to settle matters rather than be imposed upon in such a manner. They made as though they would depart without the money, but finally caved in before our firm stand, and after a pow-wow which had lasted over an hour, they settled down to tea and cigarettes before taking their departure, by which time it was nearly ten o'clock.

Tired out with our long parley, thankful to see the last of them, but pleased that we had managed to keep our tempers and that we had finally scored off these Mongols, we fed hastily and settled down in the traveller's yourt for the night with as little preparation as might be, feeling none too secure in this obviously hostile camp. In the wee sma' hours a sound of soft footsteps wakened me, and I sat up to listen. I could hear from the deep regular breathing of the other occupants of the yourt that nervousness was not troubling them unduly. But the slight sounds developed, and a sudden creaking outside woke Mr. Gull up too. An unexpected rush of horses' hoofs and more creaking presented in a flash to me what was happening outside. "They are stealing our tarantass," I whispered, and grasped my revolvers, one in each hand. We sat still and waited in silence for a while, when lights and voices reached us through

the chinks and crevices of the yourt. "Those brutes have come back to rob us," muttered Mr. Gull, and crawling quietly to the door I could see through the crack above it a crowd of faces.

"What the devil do you want?" shouted one of us, and rejoicing to find my hand steady as a rock, I prepared to fire at the first indication of attack. Indeed I was veritably within an ace of pulling the trigger, when suddenly I became conscious of a fair moustachioed, blue-eyed face, topped by a forage cap, gazing at me in gentle amazement. I could have fallen upon the neck to which it was attached in the reaction from what we believed to be a desperate situation. The Mongols were not there to attack us, but merely to usher in to the traveller's yourt a Russian officer and his servant who were posting through to Kiachta in like manner to ourselves. We quickly helped them to settle in, plied them with food and brandy (which seemed to please them enormously), and the lot of us were soon sleeping soundly and securely, I with the comfortable feeling that together we would be able to account for a good many Mongols were the ruffians to come back and raid us.

We had rather hoped that we might be able to continue our journey in this pleasant, if speechless, company, but the Russians were travelling very light, and were up and off by daybreak, while we had to wait for a new pole; a young Scotch fir being cut down, smoothed a bit, and sold to us for fifty kopecks for the purpose. I was interested

in watching the toilet of the officer, whose servant stood at attention opposite him holding a small saucepan full of water in which he washed and gargled with great thoroughness.

The appearance of the group of Mongols who were to take us on our next stage did not impress us favourably, and we felt that our men of yesterday had probably done their best to make things difficult for us. The other people in the camp too, seemed truculent and surly, begging for food from us in no too pleasant a manner. One of our new men was indeed a formidable looking ruffian, six feet tall, and with a scowl that never left his face. The others consisted of a "black man," two girls, and a lama of twenty or so. The younger girl was very pretty. She obviously mistook me for a man, and all the time she was off duty she rode alongside the tarantass making overtures to me for sweets (we had laid in a good supply on finding a particularly pleasing brand in a Russian shop in Urga), pins, flowers, or any other trifle she espied and as promptly coveted. She was so coy and merry that I felt quite sorry for my companion that all her attentions should thus be squandered upon myself. It annoyed some one else too. The young lama whose beloved, I gathered, she was, seemed distinctly uneasy, and his head was much more frequently turned in our direction than to his business of guiding the tarantass. At one halt he appeared to be telling her plainly what he thought of her frivolous behaviour, but although

she pouted very prettily it was all to no avail, and her swain tied up again, figuratively speaking, between the shafts of the tarantass, the minx relapsed once more into her engaging little ways.

At the end of the stage there was the fuss we had anticipated, and our scowling outrider looked by no means a pleasant customer when he began bullying argument for a double fare. We were, however, at this time of day in no mood to be trifled with, and throwing the money on the ground, waved our "huchao" in the face of the head man of the settlement and demanded fresh horses without delay. Two can play at a game of bluff, and we were the winning side this time. With a lively crew of no less than eight youngish men—dare-devil scallywags they looked—we were soon under way again.

CHAPTER XVIII

"When the mind is enlarged the body is at ease"
—*Chinese proverb*

THE antiquity of our tarantass was a source of constant anxiety to us, and minor mishaps, ropes wearing out, shafts slipping, and nuts becoming loose, were of frequent occurrence. Two of our riders were mere boys—one a lama, of fifteen or sixteen—who when they were drawing us insisted on riding at a reckless pace over some very rough country. I protested several times and finally, after they had repeatedly disregarded my injunctions, succeeded in bringing them to a halt. Things were soon again as bad as ever however, and we were travelling at a tremendous rate when snap, scurrrr, scuff! our front axle-tree had broken clean in two, and a wheel rolled clear away on the near side. We were now in a sorry plight, and what we were going to do we had not the slightest idea. The Mongols looked on helplessly, and were quite subdued when I told the two young ruffians, who had been so entirely responsible for the damage, in fluent English exactly my sentiments regarding themselves at that moment. By the sheer intervention of Providence we were saved from an

uncommonly awkward situation. In the dim distance, the forms of a couple of Russians riding along were descried by one of our Mongols, and leaping into his saddle he had galloped away to solicit their aid before we had diagnosed what was passing in his mind.

Of the resourcefulness, the kindness, and general *bon camaraderie* of those Russians I can hardly say enough. Our troubles were at an end. Of the pair, we diagnosed one as being perhaps a cattle-dealer in low-water—his shaggy and disreputable appearance maybe belied him: the other man was a raw young soldier carrying despatches to Kiachta. The first was a man of brains. He took in the situation at a glance and immediately set the Mongols to work; one to cut down a sapling, others to clear out some of the wreckage. Meanwhile he gave them such a dressing down as did my heart good to hear. By transforming the sapling into a sort of sleigh runner, he achieved what had seemed next to impossible, a means of conveying the tarantass, which now had a tremendous list to starboard, with our belongings inside to the next stage of the journey.

Thankful to have got even so far, we were preparing to pay off and dismiss the Mongols who had been responsible for so much trouble, but the Russian stopped us and gave us to understand that in consequence of the smash it would be better to give them nothing, and we therefore

got rid of them by writing a letter on the spot to the Yamen at Urga, setting forth our complaint and explaining that we had been obliged to abandon the tarantass at the fourth stage of our journey. The headman appeared to support the Russian's judgment, and moreover cautioned the new set of men who were to take us along in gingerly fashion in our three-wheeled and almost disabled tarantass to our resting-place for the night. Fortunately this turned out to be a very short stage, and we walked almost all the way.

Having travelled by a different, although, I presume, more or less parallel road from Urga, we were agreeably surprised to find ourselves when night fell at the little wooden shanty occupied by the young Chinese whose eyes I had treated on the downward journey, but with whose house my fellow-traveller had less pleasant associations. His quarters, however, were taken up by Chinese travellers, and we therefore put up with a family of Russians who occupied the adjoining rooms. As regards cleanliness this was certainly no improvement on the apartment next door, and I think Mr. Gull, who decided to sleep in the tarantass, had the better part. I had quite anticipated sharing the room with the Russian family who at supper time ate their meal in one corner while we, with the soldier and our friend in need as guests, had ours in the other. But they all dwindled away after their repast and I felt somewhat nonplussed when, after I had retired to my

plank bed, they trooped in one by one to say their prayers in front of the icon which decorated the corner of my abode. The men, of whom there seemed to be a nondescript half-dozen, appeared to find sleeping accommodation in odd carts and corners in the yard, and I heard next morning that the compound had not been such a quiet place of repose after all; that the cows lowed, the pigs grunted, that cocks crowed long before dawn, and finally that snores were to be heard coming from every direction.

From this time forward the two Russians, civilian and soldier, were as our brothers. For the sake of their company and from sheer gratitude for their helpfulness and resource we welcomed them gladly, and willingly shared with them all that we had in the way of provisions. We had every reason to believe that our "huchao" carried the cattle-dealer through the remaining stages free of expense, and not once but many times I gathered from an intelligible word here and there that he described us to the Mongols as near relations of the Hut'ukt'u, and therefore that there must be no further nonsense about overcharging us. This must have been the explanation of the fact that at one stage the Mongols refused payment altogether, and I am afraid it must ever remain on our consciences that we were benefiting from what was in effect an offering to the living God.

The damage to our vehicle was examined by

every man, woman, and child within reach, and a general concensus of opinion was arrived at to the effect that repair was impossible, and that the alternatives available were either to continue our journey by ox-carts drawn by ponies and to abandon our tarantass, or to remain where we were for a very precarious fortnight while a new axle was made and sent down to us from Kiachta. The latter course was out of the question, and we gaily embarked upon a journey of some 120 miles on ox-carts, little recking of the possibilities of discomfort that this means of transit involved. On one cart, which we did our utmost to keep in sight and in front of us, we packed the baggage, on the other we somewhat perilously perched ourselves. There was no protection either at the back or sides of the rough conveyance, and it was some time before we could learn to balance ourselves with any degree of comfort or feeling of security.

Arriving at the next stage about midday we were so tired with the jolting and the strain of keeping our seats that we were literally too exhausted to unpack our food, and merely stretched our cramped limbs on the grass and dozed while the ponies were caught and put between the shafts and a new relay of Mongols carried out their customary pow-wow with the last lot. The stages were now of shorter duration, and as the carts were the property of the Mongols at various points, their capacity for comfort presented a

pleasing variety. None of them, however, would in our luxurious and extravagant country, I am sure, be considered worthy of carrying manure from the farmyard to the field. The description of ox-carts which cross the Gobi and which I constantly met in Inner Mongolia applies equally to those of this region.

A further stage was rendered lively and really interesting by the discovery of the most remarkable one-year-old boy it has ever been my lot to meet. To say that the child could walk and talk like a four-year-old is to mention the least striking of his accomplishments. Mr. Gull, at the appearance of the baby in his mother's arms, was smoking a cigarette, and by unmistakable signs, to say nothing of sounds which were apparently intelligible to the surrounding Mongols, he expressed his desire for one too. He was forthwith presented with a cigarette, and we quite expected him to do what all normal children of his age would have done, pull it to pieces. But not so this child. He put it in his mouth most carefully, and looking round gravely to watch the effect he had produced, he allowed it to be lighted, when he puffed it for a moment or two before struggling to his feet and toddling off to the yourt to show his trophy to a doting grandfather. It was quite evident that that baby, as certain other babies of my acquaintance, ruled not only the yourt of his parents, but his various kith and kin in the camp to boot.

A REMARKABLE ONE-YEAR-OLD BOY

The settlement thus dominated appeared to us to be of a somewhat more wealthy character than others at which we had rested—at least, it produced a slightly superior cart, larger, and with a plank upon which to sit, while the harness had the high Russian arc-like arrangement attached to the shafts. Between this and the next stage we again crossed the Hara-Gol (at a point higher up the river than last time) and found it almost unrecognisable, so greatly had its volume decreased. That the Mongols do not devote the pick of their herds to supplying the traveller with horse-flesh for the journey between Urga and Kiachta goes without saying. As a rule, however, the ponies that were available were more or less docile, and on two stages only did we seem in peril of never reaching our destination at all; once on account of too great a pace, on another on account of no pace at all.

Starting at 5 o'clock on the morning after we had re-crossed the Hara-Gol, and with a very good-looking and pleasant young priest as outrider—it should be mentioned that to each cart was attached one pony only and that this was led by a mounted Mongol—we seemed likely to take a short cut across the Great Divide. The wheeler was hopeless, beginning with a tremendous tussle on being put between the shafts; and it was more than probable that this was his first experience of such encumbrances as cart and harness. The Mongol, whose own steed was in none too good

a temper, held him up short against his bridle, and from time to time seemed likely to be pulled from his saddle by the jerks and tugs with which the little brute tried to free himself.

Our Russian friend and the soldier had ridden ahead, and there seemed every likelihood that we were in for a lively time. After a while, however, the pony appeared to have come to terms and to settle down to the fact that he had met his master. The strain, however, had been too much for the harness, and a piece of the raw hide that formed it, parting company from the rest, gave the animal his chance. Without an instant's warning he was off, helter-skelter, over the prairie. Our lama, taken off his guard by the fracture, was left behind for a moment, but, recovering himself, darted away at a little distance, and instead of trying to catch us up did his best to head the pony up the hill, instead of allowing us to be dragged to certain destruction along a narrow road which wound up with a steep incline down to the dried-up bed of a river. There was nothing for it but to sit tight and hope for the best, and holding on to one another like grim death, we danced about like parched peas on a drum head. Sitting tight seemed to suggest relative security for a moment or two, but in front of us was a bank, and heaven knows what beyond it. "The bank will stop him," I cried; but no such luck. Up he went, and to our breathless amazement we found we had leapt, cart, pony, our-

selves, and all, not only the bank but the gully that was on the other side as well. It said much for the stability of our cart no less than for our nerves. But there were limits to the little beast's powers, and the sharply ascending ground to which he turned to avoid his master was too much for him, and, completely played out, he allowed himself to be caught. By this time our Russian friend, not understanding our delayed appearance, had very thoughtfully ridden back, and, practical man that he was, mended the harness, swearing volubly at the lama meantime. That we were alive to tell the tale seemed to us a miracle indeed.

Our next experience was a great contrast, for on the north bank of the Iro-Gol where we again changed horses, we picked up the slowest brute I met during the whole time I was in the East. So slow it was that the Russian lent me his whip in order that I might urge it on a bit from the cart. This and the fact that on one occasion I touched it gently on the back with the toe of my boot rather annoyed the Mongol who led it, and turning round he informed us in Chinese that his horse was "li h'ai" (terrible). Once and once only did it suggest the least justification of the statement, and that was when nearing camp it appeared suddenly to call its traditions, and made a very respectable entry, dashing up to the travellers' yourt in fine style.

This proved to be a very friendly settlement,

and the people crowded round the yourt to bid us welcome. I dare say friendliness was mingled with curiosity. Seeing me pour a drop or two of eau-de-Cologne on a handkerchief and pass it over my face, they were keenly desirous of paying me the compliment of imitation, and held out their hands for the bottle. Mongols are not backward in asking for what they want, and are quite of the belief that to him who asks shall be given. "Ai-iaa" they ejaculated delightedly. Most of them liked the scent, but one woman who sniffed it up too hard from the palm of her hand was greatly annoyed when it stung her nose, shaking her head like a dog, and walking off in high dudgeon when the others roared with laughter at her. They all copied my method of using it, and were smearing their faces over with their dirty hands, when our Russian took a rise out of a newcomer who had not been present at the first operation. Seeing every one rubbing their cheeks he wished of course to take part in the game, and the Russian pouring the questionable dregs of a water bottle into his outstretched palms, the trusting lama applied it to his face. The rest keenly appreciated the joke and the man himself took it in good part when he found that they were fooling him. As consolation I administered a lump of sugar dipped in tea, and this was much relished. They were a cheery lot of people here who played with us and each other like so many children.

We woke up next morning to make the acquaintance of a learned professor from the University of Tomsk, who had arrived during the night, coming in so quietly that he had disturbed no one. We learnt that he was on a surveying expedition to Ulliasutai and Kobdo. We left him planting his theodolite on the top of a hillock near the camp, the Mongols regarding his movements with the greatest suspicion and dislike. Another couple of stages brought us near the end of our journey, and as we jogged along within sight of Kiachta we reviewed our experiences during the weeks in wild Mongolia, with, to quote my fellow-traveller, "at all events this result—that at the end of the journey we both wished we were back again at the beginning".

Kiachta looked picturesque enough as we approached its quasi-civilisation once more. Still, we had no desire to remain there an hour longer than was necessary, and now that Mongolia was for the time being a thing of the past—a veritable castle in Spain which this time at any rate had materialised—I looked forward with pleasure to the—to me—unknown capital of Russia. The journey down the Selenga River contrasted pleasantly as regards duration with the up-river trip, and arriving once more at dusty Werkne-Udinsk, we lost no time in embarking upon the express train to Chelyabinsk, passing through Transbaikalia in rainy gloom. At Chelyabinsk we changed and boarded a very inferior train for

St. Petersburg, the first-class carriages of which were small and less comfortable than the average second class in any other country. Petersburg in late summer was quiet enough to be restful after our wanderings, while the cleanliness and comfort that attends sightseeing in the orthodox manner were, I am bound to admit, distinctly refreshing. But the essence of life lies in its contrasts, and after returning to London by means of the luxurious boats which ply from point to point among the beautiful islands of the Baltic, it was not many weeks before one looked back with longing to the simple life, the simple customs of a primitive people—veritably a call to the wild. Mongolia fascinated me in anticipation; in materialisation; in retrospect; and most of all in the prospect of going back again—some day.

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